

Preterism, Futurism or Historicism?

A Theological Analysis of three Interpretive Schools of Apocalyptic Prophecy within the Doctrine of the Last Things

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

As the interest in eschatology within academia as well as amongst many Christians increases, the natural outflow of apocalyptic prophecy interpretation has given occasion to two main popular interpretations, namely futurism and preterism – even to the extent of questionably influencing politics and theocratic movements. With the aim of identifying an adequate school of apocalyptic interpretation within the discourse of eschatology, this theological study within systematic theology analyses the way apocalyptic prophecy is interpreted within broader discourses on eschatology. The different hermeneutical assumptions of the various interpretation schools of apocalyptic models are researched and challenged. Preterism, which assigns apocalyptic prophecy's fulfilment to the past; futurism, which consigns apocalyptic prophecy's fulfilment to the future; and historicism, which disperses apocalyptic prophecy's fulfilment throughout the lapse of history, are the focus of this study. The study is directed towards determining whether the more adequate system for interpreting apocalyptic prophecy can be identified within the doctrine of the last things (eschatology). An analysis model is developed whereby the three interpretational schools are critically evaluated. The consequential proposal from this research is a historicist hermeneutic.

OPSOMMING

Twee prominente apokaliptiese interpretasiemodelle, naamlik preterisme en futurisme, het die afgelope tyd na vore getree as 'n natuurlike uitvloeisel van die toenemende belangstelling in eskatologie onder akademici sowel as Christene, soms met 'n twyfelagtige uitwerking op die politiek en teokratiese bewegings. Derhalwe het hierdie teologiese studie binne die dissipline van sistematiese teologie dit ten doel om 'n toepaslike skool van apokaliptiese interpretasie te identifiseer binne die breër diskoers oor eskatologie. Die hermeneutiese aansprake van verskeie apokaliptiese interpretasieskole word ondersoek en uitgedaag. Die studie fokus op preterisme, wat die vervulling van apokaliptiese profesie in die verlede plaas; futurisme, wat die vervulling daarvan aan die toekoms koppel; en historisisme, wat aanvoer dat die vervulling van apokaliptiese profesie deur die loop van die geskiedenis plaasvind. Die studie is daarop gerig om te bepaal of die meer toepaslike sisteem van apokaliptiese interpretasie geïdentifiseer kan word binne die leer van die laaste dinge (eskatologie). Vir hierdie doeleinde word 'n analisemodel ontwikkel vir die kritiese evaluering van bogenoemde interpretasieskole. Die voorstel wat hieruit voortvloei is 'n historisistiese hermeneutiek.

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DEDICATION

To my parents, Wally and Ria Stander, and grandparents, Hendrik and Maureen Stander, and Koos and Chrissie van den Heever who have all inspired me from childhood with the blessed hope of the coming *eschatos*, Jesus Christ.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 BACKGROUND	2
1.1.1 Eschatology and apocalyptic	2
1.1.2 Interpretation schools	3
1.1.3 Apocalypticism.....	3
1.1.4 Reflection.....	5
1.2 THE STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.....	6
1.2.1 The main research question	6
1.2.2 The sub-questions	6
1.3 THE ELUCIDATION OF THE PROBLEM	7
1.3.1 Delimitations of the study.....	7
1.3.2 Definitions of key terms	8
1.3.3 Presuppositions of the researcher	9
1.4 THE VALUE OF THE STUDY	10
1.5 THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	12
1.6 THE RESEARCH STRUCTURE	13
1.7 CONCLUSION	14
CHAPTER 2: AN ANALYSIS MODEL FOR THIS RESEARCH	16
2.1 INTRODUCTION.....	16
2.2 ANALYSIS MODEL	18
2.2.1 A Christological analysis.....	20

2.2.2	An apocalyptic analysis	25
2.2.3	A prophetic image analysis.....	36
2.2.4	An exegetical analysis	41
2.2.5	A practical relevance analysis	54
2.3	Conclusion	58
CHAPTER 3: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF PRETERISM		60
3.1	PRETERISM DEFINED	60
3.1.1	Introduction.....	60
3.1.2	Broad definition.....	61
3.1.3	Full preterism (or) historical critical preterism	64
3.1.4	Partial preterism (or) moderate preterism	66
3.2	MAPPING PRETERIST TEACHING	69
3.2.1	Dating of Revelation	70
3.2.2	Time indicators	71
3.2.3	The end	73
3.2.4	Two second comings.....	74
3.2.5	Apocalypse fulfilled in 1 st century.....	76
3.2.6	Eschatology	81
3.2.7	Victorious eschatology.....	85
3.2.8	Construction of the key preterist teachings.....	88
3.3	PRETERISM ANALYSED	89
3.3.1	A Christological analysis of preterism.....	89
3.3.2	An Apocalyptic analysis of preterism	99
3.3.3	A prophetic image analysis of preterism	103

3.3.4	An exegetical analysis of preterism	107
3.3.5	A practical relevance analysis of preterism.....	113
3.4	CONCLUSION	117
CHAPTER 4: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF FUTURISM.....		120
4.1	FUTURISM DEFINED	120
4.1.1	Introduction.....	120
4.1.2	Broad definition.....	123
4.1.3	Dispensational pre-tribulation futurism	125
4.1.4	Moderate (or) modified futurism.....	126
4.2	MAPPING FUTURIST TEACHINGS	127
4.2.1	Dispensationalism	128
4.2.2	Literalism	131
4.2.3	The secret rapture	136
4.2.4	The seven-year tribulation	154
4.2.5	The Antichrist appears.....	166
4.2.6	Second Coming and the millennium	168
4.2.7	Theocracy focus	169
4.2.8	Construction of the key futurist teachings	175
4.3	FUTURISM ANALYSED	176
4.3.1	A Christological analysis of futurism	176
4.3.2	An Apocalyptic analysis of futurism	180
4.3.3	A prophetic image analysis of futurism	181
4.3.4	An exegetical analysis of futurism	183
4.3.5	A practical relevance analysis of futurism.....	185

4.4	CONCLUSION	187
CHAPTER 5: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF HISTORICISM.....		189
5.1	HISTORICISM DEFINED	189
5.1.1	Introduction.....	189
5.1.2	Broad definition.....	192
5.1.3	Reformation historicism	194
5.1.4	SDA historicism	196
5.1.5	SDA historicist variants.....	198
5.2	MAPPING HISTORICIST TEACHINGS	203
5.2.1	Apocalyptic principle in Daniel 2: throughout history to the end.....	204
5.2.2	Divine sovereignty and love.....	209
5.2.3	Cosmic controversy	211
5.2.4	Redemptive history	213
5.2.5	Day-year principle.....	218
5.2.6	The Antichrist system	224
5.2.7	Second Coming	230
5.2.8	Prophetic mission: religious liberty and freedom of conscience.....	233
5.2.9	Construction of the key historicist teachings.....	236
5.3	HISTORICISM ANALYSED.....	236
5.3.1	A Christological analysis of historicism	237
5.3.2	An Apocalyptic analysis of historicism	247
5.3.3	A prophetic image analysis of historicism	252
5.3.4	An exegetical analysis of historicism	256
5.3.5	A practical relevance analysis of historicism.....	259

5.4	CONCLUSION	264
CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION.....		267
6.1	SUMMARY OF FINDINGS.....	267
6.1.1	Mapping of the three interpretational schools.....	267
6.1.2	The critical analyses of the three interpretational schools	269
6.2	SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH	274
6.3	IN CONCLUSION.....	274
BIBLIOGRAPHY		276

List of tables

Table 3.1	Various forms of preterism.....	69
Table 3.2	A brief comparison between Jesus Christ and the Antichrist (Sea Beast of Revelation 13)	109
Table 3.3	A comparison between the 'lawless power' and the 'beast rising from the sea'	110
Table 4.1	Various forms of futurism.....	127
Table 4.2	LaHaye's categories of second coming passages.....	139
Table 5.1	Various forms of historicism.....	203
Table 5.2	A comparison of Daniel 2:28 and Revelation 1:1	207
Table 5.3	Sabuin's outline of Revelation	208
Table 5.4	Apocalyptic focus on the Coming Christ as King	218

List of figures

Figure 3.1	Schematic illustration of preterism	63
Figure 3.2	Schematic illustration of partial preterism	67
Figure 3.3	Construction of key preterist teachings.....	88
Figure 3.4	Christological focus of preterism.....	89
Figure 3.5	Preterist interpretation of God's kingdom on earth as established by the Church.....	94
Figure 4.1	Schematic presentation of futurism	125
Figure 4.2	Schofield's seven dispensational model	129
Figure 4.3	Larkin's illustration of the futurist doctrine.....	134
Figure 4.4	The Second Coming of Christ in two phases.....	137
Figure 4.5	The seven-year tribulation	154
Figure 4.6	Hitchcock's outline of the futurist interpretation of Daniel 9	159
Figure 4.7	Hitchcock's illustration of the futurist interpretation of Daniel 9.....	160
Figure 4.8	The ever-increasing gap in Hitchcock's illustration of the futurist interpretation of Daniel 9.....	160
Figure 4.9	The construction of futurism	175
Figure 4.10	The futurist view of the 7 churches filling the historical timeframe	179
Figure 5.1	Schematic presentation of historicism	194
Figure 5.2	Traditional understanding of the prophetic statue in Daniel 2	205
Figure 5.3	The construction of historicism	236
Figure 5.4	Schematic illustration of the historicist view of Christ in and through history	247

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Academic publications in research journals and books denote an increase in research on eschatological themes (Hellstrom, 2007), eschatology often being called – although not uncontested – “the study of last things” (Hays, 2007:140). This interest is even more pronounced within certain strands of Christianity and its use of different (social) media platforms. The current study sets out to identify an adequate school of apocalyptic interpretation within the discourse of eschatology, for which purpose this theological study within systematic theology will analyse the way apocalyptic prophecy is interpreted within broader discourses on eschatology. The different hermeneutical assumptions of the various interpretation schools of apocalyptic models will be researched and challenged. Preterism, which assigns apocalyptic prophecy’s fulfilment to the past; futurism, which consigns apocalyptic prophecy’s fulfilment to the future; and historicism, which disperses apocalyptic prophecy’s fulfilment throughout the lapse of history will be the focus of this study. The aim of the study is to determine whether the more adequate system for interpreting apocalyptic prophecy can be identified within the doctrine of last things (eschatology).

This introductory chapter commences with a background to eschatology, including a discussion of the relation between eschatology and apocalyptic, a brief introduction to the different apocalyptic interpretation schools, a discussion of apocalypticism, and a reflection on the two popular school of interpretation, preterism and futurism, as well as the more obscure protestant approach, historicism. Subsequently, the problem statement is presented, followed by an indication of the delimitations of the study, definitions of the key terms used, a discussion of the presuppositions of the study, and the proposed value of the study. An outline of the research structure is then presented, followed by an explanation of the research methodology utilised by the study. The chapter concludes by highlighting the aim of the study.

1.1 BACKGROUND

While the academic theological world has veered into the eschatological discourse as indicative to relevant theology over the past 50 years or so, it is interesting to note that it is at the outset of this period that Jürgen Moltmann (1993:16) wrote in 1967 that “Christianity is eschatology, is hope forward looking and forward moving.” Therefore, Moltmann advocated a revision of the place of eschatology within Christian theology, since it has always been “at the end of Christian dogmatics”, “like a loosely attached appendix” (Moltmann, 1993:15). In *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, Bauckham (2008, as cited in Walls, 2008:671) refers to Moltman’s first book, *Theology of Hope*, as a “most widely influential Christian theological work on eschatology” which “most of all enabled theologians to think once more of eschatology as speaking of the real future.” In the mind of Moltmann, this real future within eschatology “speaks of the eschatological future promised by God in the resurrection of the crucified Christ and entailed by that event” (Bauckham, 2008, as cited in Walls, 2008:672). As “eschatology seems always in danger of forgetting...that Christian hope is grounded in the resurrection of the crucified Jesus” (Bauckham, 2008, as cited in Walls, 2008:672,673), should not an adequate eschatological hermeneutic be Christological¹, since the foundation of eschatology “is the *eschatos*, Jesus himself” (König, 1989:138)?

1.1.1 Eschatology and apocalyptic

Apocalyptic prophecy is key to eschatology². Whereas eschatology, broadly but not exclusively speaking, “expects a future consummation of the kingdom” (Hays, 2007:140),

¹ In *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, Bauckham (2007, as cited in Webster, 2007:318) writes that “Christian theology in the modern period, whether in Christology or in eschatology, has rarely done justice to this focal importance of Jesus himself, the divine and human person, in the completion of world history. It requires not simply that the future of the world depends on the past history of Jesus, but that Jesus himself has a future with the world that is both his own future and the future of the world. He himself as the coming saviour and judge of all determines the final future of all things.”

² Robinson (2007, as cited in Porter, 2007:16) distinguishes as follows between apocalyptic and apocalypticism: “Many scholars have recently begun to stress the distinction of ‘apocalypse’ from ‘apocalyptic’, that is, an adjective used as a noun to denote ‘apocalyptic features,’ and from ‘apocalyptic eschatology’, which represents ideas and motifs thematic of the general movement that is not unique but is found in other genres and social settings. It is also distinguished from ‘apocalypticism,’ that is, the sociological ideology behind the movement.”

apocalyptic prophecy is the channel through which eschatology is communicated, being “a work that features a heavenly figure ... using apocalyptic language to reveal a ‘secret’ message, often having eschatological focus” (Hays, 2007:34). In the *Handbook for Biblical Interpretation*, Ralph Tate (2012:22) differentiates between eschatology and apocalyptic prophecy as follows: “Eschatology is concerned exclusively with the doctrine of the end of the age; apocalypse refers to a revelation and a particular type of writing that discloses that revelation.”

1.1.2 Interpretation schools

Two of the main approaches in interpreting apocalyptic prophecy employed by theologians (especially within but not limited to evangelical Christianity) are preterism and futurism. The futuristic hermeneutic in particular has grown in popularity among Christians, as Norman Gulley (2016:20) observes, “Futurism has become the major school of interpretation of Revelation, popular among many evangelicals.” The *Believer’s Bible Commentary* (Macdonald, 2016:2456) defines the futurist principle as “Beginning with ch. 4 Revelation describes the future events accompanying the end of the age.” The wide recognition of this approach within the Christian theological world is indicated by the millions of books and films being sold espousing this hermeneutic.

1.1.3 Apocalypticism

Hal Lindsey from the Dallas Theological Seminary authored a book based on the hermeneutical principle of futurism in 1970, named *The Late Great Planet Earth*. This book was so popular that *The New York Times* named it as the “no.1 non-fiction bestseller of the decade”.³ More than 35 million copies were sold in 54 languages. This inevitably

Letseli (2009:111) cautions that “[n]ot every Apocalypse is purely eschatological (they may also interpret past or present events, not only the future).”

Letseli (2009:111) further cautions that “[n]ot all Eschatology is apocalyptic (some look forward to a future that is peaceful, not violent).”

³ Goodreads n.d., *The Late Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsey, Goodreads, viewed 19 September 2018, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/899325.The_Late_Great_Planet_Earth>.

popularised futurism to such an extent that of the fiction series of *Left Behind* books⁴ by authors Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins,⁵ which appeared from 1995 to 2007 and appealed to the imagination of Christians interested in eschatology, about 80 million books were sold.⁶ These fictional depictions of end time events were even further popularised when it was released as a movie trilogy between 2000 and 2005,⁷ and also turned into PC games.⁸ Currently, these games are in development to be released on the iOS and Android mobile platforms.⁹ This phenomenon has so saturated the psyche of a large group of Christians with the futuristic world view that even Hollywood saw monetary opportunity, and thus released a blockbuster film named *Left Behind* with lead actor Nicholas Cage.¹⁰

Preterism is the other popular apocalyptic interpretation model. Macdonald (2016:2456) explains the preterist view as follows: “All the events of Revelation were fulfilled during the period of the Roman Empire.” Being popularised by books and films, this interpretation model has also gone more mainstream recently. Recent popular non-fiction books include the trilogy written by authors Hank Hanegraaff and Sigmund Brouwer called *The Last Disciple*, *The Last Sacrifice* and *The Last Temple*.¹¹ After the popular *The BIBLE*¹² series

⁴ Tyndale House Publishers n.d., *Left Behind Books*, Tyndale House Publishers, viewed 19 September 2018, <<https://www.tyndale.com/sites/leftbehind/>>.

⁵ Thrift Books n.d., *Left Behind Books*, Thrift Books, viewed 19 September 2018, <<https://www.thriftbooks.com/series/left-behind/37387/>>.

⁶ Domonoske, C 2016, *Tim LaHaye Evangelical Legend Behind 'Left Behind' Series Dies At 90*, NPR, viewed 19 September 2018, <<https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/07/25/487382209/tim-lahaye-evangelical-legend-behind-left-behind-series-dies-at-90>>

⁷ Fish Flix n.d., *Left Behind Trilogy*, Fish Flix, viewed 19 September 2018, <<https://www.fishflix.com/products/left-behind-trilogy-3-dvd-collection>>

⁸ Left Behind Games n.d., *Left Behind: Eternal Forces*, Amazon.com, viewed 19 September 2018, <<https://www.amazon.com/Left-Behind-Eternal-Forces-PC/dp/B002PEEA0K>>

⁹ Left Behind Games n.d., *Left Behind Games*, Left Behind Games, viewed 19 September 2018, <<https://www.leftbehindgames.com/>>

¹⁰ Armstrong, V 2014, *Left Behind*, IMDb, viewed 19 September 2018, <<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2467046/>>

¹¹ Tyndale House Publishers 2017, *The Last Disciple Collection*, Tyndale House Publishers, viewed 20 September 2018, <<https://www.tyndale.com/p/the-last-disciple-collection-the-last-disciple-the-last-sacrifice-the-last-temple/20896/e-book>>

¹² Downey, R & Burnett, M 2013, *The Bible*, IMDb, viewed 20 September 2018, <<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2245988/>>

in film, NBC decided to create the film series *A.D. The Bible Continues*¹³ with producers Roma Downey and Mark Burnett, which not only depicts the events after the crucifixion, but creates the impression that these events are the last days, which is preterism at large.

Some evangelicals take this eschatological excitement to the extreme. For instance, the author Lance Wallnau predicted a Trump-presidency in the run-up to the US 2016 election, writing the book *God's Chaos Candidate*¹⁴ in 2016. He claims that his rhetoric is biblically based, in that he is only following apocalyptic prophecy. Frederick Clarkson writes an article titled 'Dominionism rising: a Theocratic Movement hiding in Plain Sight'¹⁵ where he discusses Wallnau's reasoning. Clarkson (2016) indicates Wallnau's belief that God is using Donald Trump prophetically as antitype of "Cyrus, the King of Persia in the biblical book of Isaiah who, as had been earlier prophesied, freed the Jews who had been captive in Babylon for 70 years, and helped to build the temple in Jerusalem." Clarkson (2016) quotes Wallnau and concisely describes his reasoning as follows: "God used the pagan Cyrus" so "God would use Trump" to "deliver us from Hillary." This paradigm was further strengthened by the US embassy move to Jerusalem in 2018, as this is exactly 70 years after Israel's independence in 1948, thus confirming Trump as antitype of Cyrus as indicated in the newly released book by Wallnau, *Cyrus Trump*.¹⁶ Such so called theological conclusions are sweeping the world as the populist notion of apocalypticism is rising.

1.1.4 Reflection

Due to a renewed interest in the Apocalypse and the end of the world, apocalypticism is escalating rapidly. The challenge, however, is not limited to the many different proposed

¹³ NBC n.d., *A.D. The Bible Continues*, NBC, viewed 20 September 2018, <<https://www.nbc.com/ad-the-bible-continues>>

¹⁴ CBN 2017, *Lance Wallnau: Why Trump Is 'God's Chaos Candidate'*, CBN, viewed 20 September 2018, <<http://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/us/2017/march/lance-wallnau-weighs-in-on-gods-chaos-candidate-now-americas-president>>

¹⁵ Clarkson, F 2016, *Dominionism Rising: A Theocratic Movement Hiding in Plain Sight*, Political Research, viewed 20 September 2018, <<https://www.politicalresearch.org/2016/08/18/dominionism-rising-a-theocratic-movement-hiding-in-plain-sight/>>

¹⁶ Lance Wallnau n.d., *Lance Wallnau*, Lance Wallnau, viewed 20 September 2018, <<https://lancewallnau.com/>>

models of interpreting the apocalypse, but also involves the even more different ways these models have been implemented in a prophetic conjuring of sorts to further different agendas, either by followers or for financial gains. The result is an unprecedented confusion within Christianity regarding eschatology. As the focus is placed on end-events, the division amongst theologians regarding the doctrine of last things is further complicated.

While the two approaches described above are like a theological populist wave, it is imperative to ask what about the once recognised and scholarly approach of historicism with regard to apocalyptic prophecy. Historicism is a school of interpretation referred to by Gregg (2013:13) as the “classical Protestant interpretation.” Is it in any theological sense an adequate interpretation approach to apocalyptic prophecy?

1.2 THE STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The need for identifying the more adequate system for interpreting apocalyptic prophecy within the discourse of eschatology has been established. To identify a theologically adequate system for interpreting apocalyptic prophecy, the following research question and sub-questions have been formulated:

1.2.1 The main research question

How can a theological analysis of preterism, futurism and historicism aid in identifying the more adequate of these systems for interpreting apocalyptic prophecy?

1.2.2 The sub-questions

- Amid renewed interest in apocalypticism, what are the most recognised approaches to interpret apocalyptic prophecy?
- Can an analysis model be established, on common theological grounds, against which these interpretation schools can be measured?
- What is the theological reasoning behind preterism and what will be the outcome of a critical analysis of this hermeneutic?

- What is the theological reasoning behind futurism and what will be the outcome of a critical analysis of this hermeneutic?
- What is the theological reasoning behind historicism and what will be the outcome of a critical analysis of this hermeneutic?
- After the exploration of each of these interpretation schools, can the more adequate system for interpreting apocalyptic prophecy be identified?

1.3 THE ELUCIDATION OF THE PROBLEM

Apocalyptic prophecy in Scripture is one of the main contributors to eschatology within the doctrine of last things. This theological study within systematic theology will analyse the way apocalyptic prophecy is interpreted within broader discourses on eschatology. To this end, the different hermeneutical assumptions of the various interpretation schools of apocalyptic models will be researched and challenged.

1.3.1 Delimitations of the study

As this study considers the interpretation models of apocalyptic prophecy, there will be no focus on the traditional classical prophecy found in Scripture, which forms the overwhelming portion of prophetic literature within theology. Also, eschatology as a whole will not be considered, at least not directly.

While there are many areas of prophecy that could be explored, apocalyptic or classical, this study will focus on the interpretation schools of apocalyptic prophecy. Hermeneutics will not be considered in all its details, such as exegesis, language analysis, and morphological considerations, among others. Rather, the study will exclusively concentrate on how prophecies are understood to outline eschatology in broader contours by the different interpretation schools of apocalyptic prophecy.

This study evaluates apocalyptic interpretation through analyses of the three main approaches. It is neither a study on how to interpret apocalyptic prophecy properly, nor is it creating a new method of interpretation. It is an evaluative exercise of already well-established hermeneutics. Idealism, which is also gaining popularity amongst scholars,

will not be researched as it is more of an allegorical approach, as Gregg (2013:43) explains,

I am using the label spiritual approach to include all approaches that do not look for individual or specific fulfillments of the prophecies of Revelation in the natural sense, but which believe only that spiritual lessons and principles... are depicted symbolically in the visions.

According to Davidson (2007, as cited in Du Preez, 2007:52–53), the interpretation school of idealism maintains that “Daniel and Revelation gives a generalized portrayal of struggle between good and evil but refuses to make application of the various symbols to specific historical fulfillments.”

I am only focusing on the main approaches that view prophecy as literal prediction with a literal historical or futuristic fulfillment, unlike idealism that does not view prophecy as literal. Thus, in line with real historical fulfillment, preterism, futurism, and historicism will be researched in a deductive study of apocalyptic prophecies.

1.3.2 Definitions of key terms

Preterism: The apocalyptic-prophetical hermeneutic where the prophecies under consideration are viewed as fulfilled close to and around the day of the original writer. Gregg (2013:13) describes preterism as an approach that “views the fulfillment of Revelation’s prophecies as having occurred already, in what is now the ancient past”. Gulley (2016:21) simply defines it as “all interpretation back in history.”

Futurism: The apocalyptic-prophetical hermeneutic where the prophecies under consideration are viewed as fulfilled in the far future during the biblical end times – far removed from the original writer’s day. Gulley (2016:22) views futurism as projecting “most of Revelation (4–22) into future history,” whereas Mounce (1977:28), in reflection on Kuyper, describes it more emphatically, stating that “Revelation has nothing to do with the history of the world prior to the eve of the parousia.”

Historicism: The apocalyptic-prophetical hermeneutic where the prophecies under consideration are viewed as fulfilled throughout history, from the original writer’s day to

the climax of the biblical end times. Gregg (2013:13) sees it as the “classical Protestant interpretation” which sees Revelation as “a prewritten record of the course of history from the time of John to the end of the world.” Or, as Gulley (2016:22) notes, it is a panoramic view of “the unfolding of history as one goes through the book” of Revelation.

1.3.3 Presuppositions of the researcher

In my master’s dissertation within the master’s programme of Systematic Theology at Stellenbosch University (graduated April 2018, cum laude), I focused on theodicy with reference to the notions of ‘promise’ and ‘presence’, researching the work of Jürgen Moltmann and Paul Fiddes. Eschatology is a key doctrine in both of their theologies.

With the current study within the doctoral programme of Systematic Theology, a specific aspect within eschatology is researched that is quite essential and prominent within my faith tradition of Adventism, and thus my theological paradigm. The Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA) has always emphasised eschatology and proclaimed a lifestyle of spirituality and readiness for the nearing eschaton¹⁷ through interpreting apocalyptic prophecy with the historicist approach and thus seeing the apocalypse as the unfolding of history.

Commenting on the historicist approach, Gregg (1997:59) wrote in the previous century that “[m]ost modern scholars, however, find little good to say about this approach.” In the first edition of *Revelation, Four Views: a Parallel Commentary*, published in 1997, he argued, “To my knowledge, the only modern commentaries that espouse this view have not come from recognized scholars (not that this fact should condemn them), but from essentially self-published authors who are desirous to reintroduce this viewpoint to a modern readership” (Gregg, 1997:33). In his updated version, however, published in 2013, he revised his approach to include Seventh-day Adventist theologians, but still in an obscure way, “To my knowledge, the only modern commentaries that still espouse this

¹⁷ Seventh-day Adventist Church n.d., *The Second Coming of Christ*, Seventh-day Adventist Church, viewed 21 September 2018, <<https://www.adventist.org/en/beliefs/restoration/the-second-coming-of-christ/>>

view today have not come from recognized scholars (not that this fact should condemn them), but from Seventh-day Adventists and essentially self-published authors who are desirous to reintroduce this viewpoint to a modern readership” (Gregg, 2013:54). Yet, in the same book, Gregg (2013:13) acknowledges this hermeneutic as the “classical Protestant interpretation”. This logically leads to the question of why some theologians, who prefer or utilise the popular preterism or futurism hermeneutic, would deem this classic approach inadequate. Yeatts (2003:25) states that “the historicist method leads to confusion” because of “its radical subjectivity.”

What then about all the other theologians¹⁸ besides SDA theologians that subscribe to the historicist hermeneutic? Is it possible that, as Moltmann (1993) observes, “present and future ... stand in contrast to each other in Christian eschatology” (Moltmann, 1993:18) and that “these end events” are seen “to put an end to the history” (Moltmann, 1993:15) rather than explaining that “Christianity is eschatology, is hope forward looking and forward moving” (Moltmann, 1993:16) throughout history? Instead of history coming to an end, Fiddes (2000:23) suggests that “it may be an end *in* history” (emphasis added). Can it be that history and the present are being divorced from eschatology within preterism and futurism, causing the loss of a hermeneutic that could bring hope and promise (Moltmann, 1993:17–18), as it is misunderstood in its plight to embrace history as well as the future for a hopeful present? Is not the purpose of eschatology to give hope within the present and for the future – throughout and *in* history?

1.4 THE VALUE OF THE STUDY

In examining a wide range of literature in the preparation process of this study, I have discovered extensive research that upholds one or the other apocalyptic school of interpretation, including research that upholds preterism and futurism as adequate hermeneutic. These studies will be utilised throughout this research.

Frost (2002:210), for instance, wrote in defence of preterism. In his study titled *Misplaced Hope: The Origins of First and Second Century Eschatology*, he found that “[m]odern

¹⁸ Like Oral E. Collins, Robert Caringola, Francis N. Lee, Victor McGowan, Fred P. Miller and others...

Christian eschatology is based upon an early church error: assuming the Second Coming was delayed, by misunderstanding its spiritual fulfillment in A.D. 70 ... We need not remain in this wilderness of misplaced hope. Rather, through sound biblical scholarship, we can recover the transforming hope that the early church embraced." Yet, Frost had a paradigm shift in 2010 and authored a book in 2012 called *Why I left Full Preterism* in which he invalidates full preterism.

Hollett (2018), who at first subscribed to preterism, after much research concluded that futurism is the most adequate interpretation school to be utilised. He critiques preterism and writes that much of his research explores "the differences between preterism and futurism, that is, the view that these prophecies will be fulfilled in our future" (Hollett, 2018:45–46), since "[p]reterism posits an alternate view of prophecy that is vastly different than traditional futurist readings of Scripture" (Hollett, 2018:39–40).

Studies have been done in evaluating these three interpretive schools to some extent, like that of Anderberg (2017). Yet, none that were found provided sufficient scrutiny.

The emphasis on historicism as adequate apocalyptic hermeneutic,¹⁹ although present in the work of influential and respected theologians, seems to be less well-developed as a model or paradigm.

Some smaller studies and works by historicists have been done; however, in my opinion these are not sufficient and have only been dismissed on the grounds of insufficient comparison with other approaches. The most significant work in this category of apocalyptic interpretation is the research project directed by Leroy E. Froom contained in four volumes and published as *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*. To my knowledge, this is the most extensive research in this field. But it is mainly of a historical nature in tracing prophetic interpretation through almost 2000 years of history, and thus not efficient in answering the key theological questions of this research.

¹⁹ Some academics within the SDA Church have argued against historicism. In the previous century, Desmond Ford was a main proponent making claims against historicism, arguing for an integration of preterism, futurism, idealism and historicism. See also Kai Arasola's doctoral dissertation titled 'The End of Historicism: Millerite Hermeneutic of Time Prophecies in the Old Testament'. More recent publications with a similar approach include Jeff Crocombe's doctoral dissertation titled, 'A Feast of Reason: The Roots of William Miller's Biblical Interpretation and its influence on the Seventh-day Adventist Church'.

Evidently, there is a lack of proper research available to evaluate whether historicism is an adequate apocalyptic interpretation school, as compared to preterism and futurism, and the current study seeks to address this gap. The hope is that the study can contribute to more responsible theological discourse on apocalyptic prophecy.

1.5 THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data needed to undertake and complete this study were found in journals, articles, books, and videos of presentations, and have been accessed online or obtained from libraries.

The methodology that I employed throughout this research is literary study, as I engaged the various conceptual literature in philosophical debate as constructive systematic theological inquiry. Within this methodology, the importance of careful and critical analyses, epistemological critiquing and comparative study is emphasised. These principles have been adhered to throughout the research in its logical steps and stages.

No researcher can truly be impartial or unbiased as we are all products of our own worlds, and I will be the first to acknowledge this of myself. I endeavour to do this research by following a systematic method and being “critically open to the new voices and emphases of recent theology” (Migliore, 2004:xiii). Undoubtedly, my faith tradition of Adventism has a tremendous impact and influence on my theological paradigm. The Seventh-day Adventist Church’s emphasis on eschatology and a lifestyle of spirituality and readiness for the nearing eschaton unarguably helped form my theological framework. This faith tradition which interprets apocalyptic prophecy with the historicist approach, viewing the apocalypse as the unfolding of history, has greatly impacted my hermeneutical lens. Yet, I endeavour to “be self-critically aware” of my “own social location and ecclesial context” (Migliore, 2004:xiv). In an attempt to be more balanced and unbiased, I undertook at the outset of this research to listen to a broad range of theologians outside my own faith tradition in my search for a responsible model whereby to analyse the different interpretation schools. I highly value “the help and correction that comes from continuing dialogue with Christians whose experience and context is quite different from my own” (Migliore, 2004:xiv).

1.6 THE RESEARCH STRUCTURE

This study consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 sets the background and introduces the problem addressed by the study. Subsequent to the problem statement, sub-questions are proposed in support of the main research question: *How can a theological analysis of preterism, futurism and historicism aid in identifying the more adequate of these systems for interpreting apocalyptic prophecy?*

Although key doctrines, such as *The Covenant*, *The Kingdom of God*, *The Last Days*, and *Israel as God's People*, among others, usually determine the preferred hermeneutical approach, an attempt to measure the dogmatic views of the different apocalyptic interpretation schools would be futile, as few would agree to my biased doctrinal views. This is why, instead, the research is approached from the outset on a basis of commonality that most can agree with. In accordance, Chapter 2 lays the foundation for the chapters to follow, establishing the framework for the research which endeavours to evaluate preterism, futurism and historicism. A five-tier analysis model is proposed whereby the different apocalyptic interpretation schools can be measured.

Chapter 3 commences by defining the model of preterism and exploring its key teachings. Subsequently, it is critically analysed with reference to the five-tier analysis model established in Chapter 2.

In Chapter 4, the model of futurism is firstly defined, and its key teachings mapped. It is then critically analysed with reference to the five-tier analysis model established in Chapter 2.

Chapter 5 defines the model of historicism and maps its key teachings, after which the model is critically analysed with reference to the five-tier analysis model established in Chapter 2.

It is imperative to point out that the purpose of this study in Chapters 3 to 5 is not to analyse varying theological positions, but to weigh the hermeneutic within the eschatology of apocalyptic interpretation schools. Preterism, futurism and historicism are not theological positions or doctrines but hermeneutic frameworks whereby eschatology is interpreted and understood. Each of these hermeneutic frameworks can subscribe to

varying theological positions within the systematic theological sphere of eschatology, since this is how hermeneutical schemes work in its application. But while this study is measuring the effectiveness of the hermeneutic itself and not per se doctrine or theology, part of this measurement needs to include a mapping of the teachings that are used to validate this hermeneutic.

Based on the findings in the three previous chapters, Chapter 6 considers the research question: *How can a theological analysis of preterism, futurism and historicism aid in identifying the more adequate of these systems for interpreting apocalyptic prophecy?*

It suggests an adequate system for interpreting apocalyptic prophecy in answering the sub-question: *After the exploration of each of these interpretation schools, can the more adequate system for interpreting apocalyptic prophecy be identified?* The argument and findings are summarised, followed by suggestions and a proposal.

Please note that text quoted from Scripture is from the *New King James Version* (1982)²⁰, unless otherwise indicated.

1.7 CONCLUSION

This introductory chapter indicated that apocalyptic prophesy is key to eschatology. It explained that different approaches to apocalyptic interpretation cause confusion within Christianity regarding eschatology. The consequent need for an adequate system for interpreting apocalyptic prophecy was pointed out in the problem statement. After the main research question was formulated, sub-questions were presented. The delimitations of the study were indicated, and key terms defined. Subsequently, the presuppositions of the study as well as the proposed value of the study were discussed. The research methodology was described, and the research structure was outlined.

The aim of the study is to determine whether the more adequate system for interpreting apocalyptic prophecy can be identified within the doctrine of the last things (eschatology), as to be of value to theologians as well as to Christians interested in the apocalypse.

²⁰ The researcher found the NKJV to be the translation universally used by many of the preterist, futurist and historicist scholars.

Hopefully, we can arrive at a much-needed approach that presents a “Christological eschatology,” as Gulley (1998:98) calls for, where Christ is the “last One” within eschatology, instead of playing an “incidental role”, as König (1989:1) argues.

Chapter 2 will introduce an analysis model for this study.

CHAPTER 2: AN ANALYSIS MODEL FOR THIS RESEARCH

Chapter 1 provided a background to eschatology, indicated the relation between eschatology and apocalyptic, and briefly introduced the different apocalyptic interpretation schools. With reference to the identified need for an adequate interpretive system towards apocalyptic prophecy, it was indicated that this study endeavours to determine an adequate apocalyptic interpretive system in a deductive study of apocalyptic prophecies. This firstly requires an analysis of each of the main apocalyptic interpretation schools. Hence, a five-tier analysis model for the evaluation of the different interpretation schools is proposed in this chapter.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Within theological circles, there has been a substantial paradigm shift regarding eschatology and apocalyptic. This was initiated by Albert Schweitzer (1906) and Karl Barth (1918), amongst others, who “caused theologians to rediscover eschatology” (Gulley, 2016:494) in a time of which Erickson (2013:1056) says, “Eschatology received closer examination than ever before.” Although these two theologians did not foresee what Moltmann (1993:137) would later describe as “a world that is coming and one that is passing away,” they helped establish a new emphasis on eschatology in theology. Erickson (2013:1063–1064) also mentions theologians like Weiss, Dodd and Bultmann, amongst others, who influenced and prompted this change of view, and guided theologians such as Rowley (1944), Russell (1964), Von der Osten-Sacken (1969), and more recently Hanson (1975), Baldwin (1978), Cross (1973) and Collins (1984) (Johnson, 2001, as cited in Dederen, 2001:808).

In his landmark essay written in 1960, Käsemann refers to apocalyptic as the mother of Christian theology (Johnson, 2001, as cited in Dederen, 2001:808). In the same vein, systematic theologians like Pannenberg (1968) and Moltmann (1967) placed strong emphasis on the importance of apocalyptic literature for the early stages of Christian theology (Johnson, 2001, as cited in Dederen, 2001:808).

According to Moltmann's, systematic theology can conclude that "eschatology is not merely the final loci of systematic theology, as if an appendix, but should be an all-pervading focus for the entire system" (Gulley, 2016:490).²¹

Accordingly, Migliore (2004:337) terms the doctrine of last things 'Christian Hope'. Moltmann (1993:16) argues in a new revelatory, evocative pronouncement that "the eschatological outlook is characteristic of all Christian proclamation, of every Christian existence and of the whole Church."

This should be our experience; however, there is an immediate challenge to this. Given the various interpretations of the biblical apocalyptic from where we derive our eschatology, which includes approaches to apocalyptic interpretation such as preterism, futurism and historicism, how will be our Christian proclamation and existence? On account of this question, I am convinced that this research is critical to the larger scope of Christian proclamation and existence.

To analyse the main approaches to apocalyptic interpretation, a five-tier analysis model is proposed that is inspired by Scripture, and which can be agreed upon by the proponents of the different interpretational schools involved. The hermeneutical principles employed to create this analysis will be overarching principles that most preterists, futurists and historicists could acknowledge as good theological principles. For whereas this research is done from within an Adventist worldview, most scholars used to develop this analysis model is over a broad spectrum of theological views and outside of an Adventist paradigm, as to ensure it is an acceptable model based on common ground. From such a common foundation, and through the lens of this analysis model, an adequate approach can be determined more logically.

²¹ To support this, Gulley (2016:490) quotes Moltmann (1967) from his book *Theology of Hope*: "Eschatology means the doctrine of Christian hope, which embraces the object hoped for and the hope inspired by it. From first to last, and not merely in epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving and also revolutionizing and transforming the present. The eschatological is not one element of Christianity, but it is the medium of Christian faith as such, the key in which everything is set, the glow that suffuses everything here in the dawn of an expected new day."

2.2 ANALYSIS MODEL

In developing a model, source material that is acceptable to all three worldviews should be employed. The source that all three²² interpretive systems claim gives origin to its hermeneutic, is the first chapter of the book of Revelation.

Preterist Gentry (2010:15) introduces “two vital and foundational issues for properly understanding Revelation” namely “*when* his prophecies will transpire” as well as “*how* his prophecies should be interpreted.” Gentry (2010:15) finds that “both of these matters are found in John’s opening chapter.” Gentry (2010:18-23) continues to explicate these two premises out of the first verses of Revelation chapter one and extrapolate from this that “the main thrust of Revelation, then, must be ‘preteristic’” (Gentry 2010:21).

Similarly, futurist Hitchcock (2012:54,55) invokes Revelation chapter one stating that Christ “Himself provides a key to unlock” its meaning. Referring to Revelation chapter one Hitchcock (2012:76,77) with reference to the Greek word *apokalupsis* finds the hermeneutic to be employed as futurism since the “purpose of the book is to reveal, uncover, or take the lid off the future.”

Likewise, historicist Finley (2020:169) utilises Revelation chapter one in arguing that historicism, as the “key to interpreting the entire book of Revelation”, is confirmed in Revelation chapter one where John is told “to write (1) ‘the things which you have seen,’ (2) ‘the things which are, and’ (3) ‘the things that will take place after this.’” Finley (2020:169) then observes that it is evident that these prophecies “begin where the prophet is, and they take us from that point down to the end of time.” Correspondingly, Sabuin (2008:174) declares that the “Apocalypse of Jesus Christ itself provides literary indicators for historicism.”

Are there any relevant principles that are echoed in and alluded to in the first chapter of Revelation that could inspire the development of an analysis model? The New Testament

²² Historicism would also include the second chapter of the book of Daniel, as giving origin to its hermeneutic.

Apocalypse introduces its prophecies to the reader with an encouragement to study it (Revelation 1:1–3):

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants – things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.

This apocalyptic introduction serves as inspiration to search for an analysis model to better interpret apocalyptic. It also provides certain key indicators of what apocalyptic interpretation could be based upon.

1. “*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*”

The first five words of the Apocalypse shows that this book is about Jesus Christ. It is thus entirely Christological and should be interpreted as such.

2. “*shortly come to pass*”, “*the time is at hand*”

These are not only time indicators, but being apocalyptical, are eschatological in nature. Thus, apocalyptic interpretation should be according to the nature of apocalyptic.

3. “*signified it by his angel*”

The word ‘signified’ in Greek is *σημαίνω* (*semaino*), which means ‘to show by sign’ or ‘indicate’. The Book of Revelation is therefore phrased and clothed with symbolism and should be interpreted accordingly.

4. *“he that reads, and they that hear”*

This (‘read’) calls for observation, study and comprehension to grasp (‘hear’) and see the picture and message²³ of the apocalypse. Therefore, apocalyptic interpretation should be done with careful exegetical analysis.

5. *“Keep those things which are written therein”*

This denotes a practical application where the contents of this book are relevant to the reader. Therefore, a practical relevance hermeneutic should be utilised to enable the Apocalypse to give relevant hope and sense to the present of the reader.

To guide the development of an analysis model for this research, each of these principles will be examined in the sections that follow.

2.2.1 A Christological analysis

Lichtenwaller (2008:11) notes that, in contemporary culture, the term ‘Apocalypse’ has become a synonym for ‘doomsday’, a reference to the end of the world. Yet, the Apocalypse begins with the words “The Revelation of Jesus Christ”. This denotes not only that it is Christ who reveals to us the things to come, but also that it is Christ himself who is revealed.

Lichtenwaller (2008:11) thus observes that Jesus Christ is both the content and agent of this “Revelation of Jesus Christ”. In the same vein, Gulley (1998:76) fittingly remarks that “end-events begin with Christ and not with end-events” and as such “we must not begin in the future and read back into the past, starting with events and fitting Christ into them. Rather, we must begin with Christ” (Gulley, 1998:98). Hence, the whole Apocalypse is Christological in nature and scope, being “Scripture’s last word on Him (Christ)” (Lichtenwaller, 2008:12). Welker (2002:220) suggests that the question is not ‘What is to come?’ as much as it is ‘Who is coming?’ Therefore, a Christological eschatology is critical

²³ Trafton (2005:14) urges the reader of Revelation as follows: “The reader who truly desires to ‘hear what the Spirit says to the churches’ must lay aside all such preconceived notions and let the text speak for itself.”

(Gulley, 1998:98), where Christ is the ‘last One’ within eschatology, instead of playing an incidental role, as König (1989:1) argues. Therefore Moltmann (1993:16) writes that “[e]schatology is the passionate suffering and passionate longing kindled by the Messiah,” for “Christian eschatology speaks of Jesus Christ” (Moltmann, 1993:17) and therefore “the future is grounded in the person and history of Jesus Christ” (Moltmann, 1993:17). König (1989:138) maintains that “we must return to the foundation of eschatology, which is the *eschatos*, Jesus himself.” The author insists that Christ alone makes eschatology, arguing that it does not exist simply because “things happen”. It is Christ coming onto the scene that *makes* them happen and which results in eschatology. Thus, there is no eschatology when Jesus, the *eschatos*, is absent (König, 1989:138). Therefore the Apocalypse (Lichtenwalter, 2008:12) “presents Jesus Christ as history’s controlling reality and describes Him in such a way that absolutely everything is subordinated to Him.” It can therefore be concluded that “Jesus is what the end is all about” (Paulien, 1994:81). This Christ-centered view of the end is the great antidote to wild claims about it. Paulien (1994:83) proposes that prophetic interpretation is not determined by the clear picture of the future one can concoct but by gaining a clear picture of Christ. The Apocalypse is firstly then Christological and should be interpreted accordingly, for as Lichtenwalter (2008:12) surmises, “[r]evelation is nothing if not focused on Jesus Christ.”

In Greek, the word ‘Revelation’ within the first phrase of the Apocalypse is ἀποκάλυψις (*apokalupsis*). McGrath (2011:444) explains the meaning as ‘unveiling,’ ‘disclosure,’ or ‘revelation’. It is a composite word combined of two Greek words, namely ἀπο (*apo*), which means ‘away from’ or ‘taking away’, and κάλυψις (*kalupsis*), which means ‘a veiling’ or ‘a covering’. Thus, it refers to the unveiling of something concealed before. The unveiling of what? Jesus Christ. This means that He had to be concealed before, in order that He could be revealed. This is a direct allusion to his incarnation, where he was veiled in flesh. Scripture declares, “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him” (John 1:18). How did Christ reveal God to humanity? By concealing himself. Scripture says, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

In the mystery of the divine incarnation, Christ veiled himself in human nature and flesh and so that by this very act He revealed the glory of the eternal. Please note the act of Christ after veiling himself in humanity. He dwelt among us. The Greek word for 'dwelt' is *σκηνώω* (*skenoo*), which denotes 'pitching tent' or 'encamp', taken from the root word *σκηνή* (*skene*), meaning 'tabernacle'. This is a direct allusion to the Old Testament tabernacle to which God referred by commanding Moses, "[M]ake Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8). This tabernacle was the typological embodiment of what Christ would come to be when he veiled himself in flesh in order to dwell with us. This is why the angel declared regarding Christ to be born, "[T]hey shall call His name Immanuel" (Matthew 1:23), which is translated as 'God with us'. Notably, the notion of *God with us* at the beginning of the Apocalypse is repeated at the end of the Apocalypse: "And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.'" (Revelation 21:3)

This revelation of Jesus Christ within the Apocalypse is significant to sound apocalyptic hermeneutics. The Apocalypse itself asks for a Christological hermeneutic with a clear allusion to the Old Testament tabernacle²⁴ which denotes the indwelling of an imminent God in a divine perichoresis. Thus, the Book of Revelation becomes Christological and spiritually significant. This is also true when its literary structure is studied in the context of its chiasms.

The Apocalypse's very structure is witness to its Christocentric nature as "a piece of magnificent literary art, with its series of sevens and various recurring themes and symbolisms" (Strand, 1979:33). Bauckham (1993:4) calls it "a complex literary creation, dense with meaning and allusion," while Letseli (2001:62) deduces that "[t]he theology or messages of the Apocalypse of John flow and rest on an aesthetic, symmetrical design," which Maxwell (1985:62) calls "a book of internal artistry". LaRondelle (2015:8) echoes this by pointing out that various Bible scholars have begun to appreciate the internal

²⁴ The Old Testament tabernacle can be seen employed as typological pattern within the Apocalypse which becomes clear when the literary chiastic structure of it is studied. This will not be observed in this study.

artistry of John's Apocalypse and have concentrated on the literary composition and structural unity of the book.

In the light of this needed Christological hermeneutic, a Christological analysis is proposed whereby the different interpretation schools can be measured. The most accurate way of developing such an analysis will be to follow what is revealed already within the Apocalypse. It has already been established that the opening of Revelation shows that the Apocalypse is about Christ being revealed. Therefore, as one studies the first chapter of Revelation, one observes the Apocalyptic Christ.

Revelation 1:5 portrays Christ as "the faithful witness". Careful exegesis will confirm that this witness is the prophetic witness of Christ in his prophetic office. Therefore, in the context of Christological analysis, the following question can be posed: *Is the interpretation revealing Christ as Prophet?* Revelation 1:5 further portrays Christ as "Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood". So, in the context of Christological analysis, the following question can also be posed: *Is the interpretation revealing the Crucified Christ?* Moreover, Revelation 1:5 refers to Christ as "the ruler over the kings of the earth". Thus, in the context of Christological analysis, the following question can be posed: *Is the interpretation revealing Christ as King?* Revelation 1:7 further depicts Christ as "He [who] is coming with the clouds". Thus, in the context of Christological analysis, the following question can be posed: *Is the interpretation revealing the Coming Christ?* Furthermore, Revelation 1:8 represents Christ as "the Beginning and the End" and as "the Lord, who is and who was and who is to come". In the context of Christological analysis, the following question can thus be posed: *Is the interpretation revealing Christ in and through history?* Revelation 1:8 also presents Christ as "the Almighty". Therefore, in the context of Christological analysis, the following question can be posed: *Is the interpretation revealing the Divine Christ?* Revelation 1:12–13 illustrates Christ in a priestly office by showing his priestly clothing, "clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band" within a tabernacle setting of "seven golden lampstands". Hence, in the context of Christological analysis, the following question can be posed: *Is the interpretation revealing Christ as Priest?* To add, on account of Revelation 1:13 rendering Christ as "the Son of Man", in

the context of Christological analysis, the following question can be posed: *Is the interpretation revealing the Incarnated Christ?* Revelation 1:5,18 also refers to Christ as “the firstborn from the dead” and as “alive forevermore”. And so, in the context of Christological analysis, the following question can be posed: *Is the interpretation revealing the Resurrected Christ?* Finally, Revelation 1:18 portrays Christ as having “the keys of Hades and of Death”. In the context of Christological analysis, the following question can thus be posed: *Is the interpretation revealing the Victorious Christ?*

These questions will be applied in the Christological analysis of preterism, futurism and historicism in the next three chapters. It is vital, though, to understand these ten questions in the correct context, namely that of Christ’s threefold ministry of Prophet, Priest and King. This will also largely assist in the Christological analysis of preterism, futurism and historicism in the next three chapters.

The first question in the proposed Christological analysis relates to revealing Christ as Prophet. The next two questions correspond with this first question, relating to revealing the Incarnated Christ and the Crucified Christ. The next question, which concerns revealing Christ as Priest, is asked in conjunction with the following two questions regarding the Resurrected Christ and the Victorious Christ. Lastly, the question concerned with revealing Christ as King relates directly to the questions that follow regarding the portrayal of Christ as the Coming Christ, the Divine Christ and Christ in and through history. This last question also pertains to the two previous main questions.

Throughout Revelation, the Apocalyptic Christ, who is at the heart of this book, is revealed in his threefold ministry of Prophet, Priest and King. Wainwright (1997:185) relates that it is when you “turn to the book of Revelation” that you observe “the historic offices of Christ”. Calvin (1542, as cited by Reid, 1954:95) denotes that for his ministry, Christ was “anointed by his Father to be king, priest, and prophet.” The context of the ten questions utilised as measurements of a specific hermeneutic, will be the Book of Revelation, since they were derived from there. Thus, by asking these ten questions it is to be determined whether the hermeneutic of preterism clearly shows forth the threefold ministry of Christ as revealed within the first chapter of Revelation.

2.2.2 An apocalyptic analysis

In the first three verses of Revelation, one finds the words “shortly come to pass” and “the time is at hand”. These phrases are not only time indicators but eschatological in nature in an apocalyptic context. An apocalyptic²⁵ hermeneutic is essential for the best interpretation within the context of apocalyptic prophecy. Gabel (1996:156) confirms the importance for a serious student of the Bible to know the distinctive nature of apocalyptic writing. Davidson (2007, as cited in Du Preez, 2007:44) supports this, observing that Christian interpreters often do not distinguish between the principles for interpreting classical prophetic literature and those for apocalyptic prophesy, which “underlies many of the bizarre interpretation of Daniel and Revelation that frequently are encountered.” Thus, it is critical to interpret apocalyptic prophecy by recognising the nature of apocalyptic according to its literature type. Strand (1979:18) correctly discerns that “[a]pocalyptic has its particular emphasis. Whereas, for instance, narrative gives illustration by typical example, wisdom literature emphasizes practicality, and general prophecy stresses ethic, apocalyptic places its main emphasis on destiny.”

I will mostly use Strand’s (1979:18) outline of the special characteristics of apocalyptic nature (Robinson, 2007, as cited in Porter, 2007:16) which distinguish apocalyptic prophecy from other texts. These characteristics are: striking contrasts, cosmic sweep, eschatological emphasis, implied ethic, origin in times of distress and perplexity, basis in visions and dreams, extensive use of symbolism, use of composite symbolism, eschatology from outside of history, and divine sovereignty and unconditionality. These characteristics of apocalyptic literature are discussed in more detail in the sections to follow.

²⁵ Certain scholars would argue that this is not sufficient to interpret Revelation since it is a letter. I would argue that even though Revelation was originally written as a letter, it is still apocalyptic prophecy and the apocalyptic hermeneutic I propose is only one part of five-part analysis which would also apply to Revelation being a letter. Further, we should understand that it is not a letter in isolation, as Bauckham (1993:2) confirms, “Revelation seems to be an apocalyptic prophecy in the form of a circular letter to seven churches in the Roman province of Asia.” Bratches (1993:1) declares of the Book of Revelation: “This is an apocalypse (1:1), that is, a book that deals with eschatological matters, events that take place at the end of human history. There are apocalyptic passages elsewhere (such as Daniel 7–12, and Mark 13 and parallels), but this is the one biblical book that is thoroughly apocalyptic.”

(i) *Striking contrasts*²⁶

Davidson (2007, as cited in Du Preez 2007:47) points out the striking contrasts in apocalyptic, sometimes referred to as dualism.²⁷

Strand (1979:18) explains this uniquely apocalyptic characteristic by stating that in Apocalyptic there is no “gradual fusion or blending” of two sides; rather, there is a “clear division between good and evil.”

To add, Hays (2007:36) highlights these striking contrasts by referring to “a dualistic perspective that categorizes things into contrasting elements such as good and evil, this age and the age to come.” Fiddes (2000:24) views it as “a dualism between this world and another world, where the ‘other world’ may be either spatially or temporally located, or both.” He suggests that in this dualistic context “the apocalypse may offer revelation both about a parallel reality going on in heaven, and about the final destiny of the world and individuals in ‘the age to come’” (Fiddes, 2000:24). In addition, Gabel (1996:159) asserts that “the drama of apocalypse presents two mighty opposites who must meet in mortal combat...operating within it is a force for good and a force for evil.”

Johnson (2001, as cited in Dederen, 2001:787–788) maintains that in Revelation, heaven and earth are in the closest touch ever described in the Bible. This relationship between the realms above and realms below has been labeled a ‘vertical continuity’ (Johnson, 2001, as cited in Dederen, 2001).

²⁶ Strand (1979:18) lists some striking contrasts in the Book of Revelation as illustration: “There are, for example, people of God and people of the adversary, the seal of God and the mark of the beast, the Faithful and True Witness and the serpent that deceives the world, the virgin and the harlot, the armies of heaven and the armies of earth...”

²⁷ Richard Davidson (2007, as cited in Du Preez, 2007:45) elucidates the term dualism in the context of apocalyptic: “This is not Greek, Platonic dualism, which contrasts the transitory, inferior things of earthly matter with the eternal, sublime realms of timeless and spaceless spirit. Rather, apocalyptic has the ‘dualism’ of biblical realism, contrasting good and evil, this age and the Age to Come (both within time), earth and heaven (both spatio-temporal realities), Christ and Satan, the righteous and the wicked, etc. These striking contrasts are apparent at every turn in both Daniel and Revelation.”

(ii) *Cosmic sweep*

Regarding this apocalyptic characteristic, Strand (1979:18) explains that “Apocalyptic has cosmic sweep or universal scope.” This means that it “deals with large themes.” It therefore does not concern a “limited historical framework,” but “the whole span of human history.”

According to Bauckham (1988, as cited in Ferguson, 1988:34), “[h]istorical-eschatological apocalypses... are concerned with God’s purposes in history, often including reviews of history within a scheme of divinely ordained periods.” They maintain that the focus is on the end of this historic age when God will “overcome the evil powers which oppress his people, eliminate all evil and suffering, and establish his universal kingdom forever.”

In addition, Gabel (1996:159) refers to the level of conflict in apocalypses as cosmic, since this battle between good and evil spans history. Davidson (2007, as cited in Du Preez, 2007:52) makes mention of the fact that, in apocalyptic literature, prophetic visions often present the full sweep of history, from the time of the prophet to the end of time. He insists that in this historical scope there is “no gap between the local setting and the final end, or between the different stages of the prophetic fulfillment.”

This cosmic sweep portraying the cosmic conflict between good and evil as “the battle against principalities and powers in the heavenly places” (Fiddes, 2000:24) is confirmed by Rowland (2005, as cited in Vanhoozer, 2005:52) who mentions the “resolution of the dualistic contrast between heaven and earth, good and evil” and the overcoming of the stark contrast between God and the world. This cosmic sweep will climax when “God’s presence is on earth, dwelling in a renewed creation and in the new Jerusalem” (Rowland, 2005, as cited in Vanhoozer, 2005:53) and “the already existing heavenly kingdom will be ‘inserted into human history’” (Fiddes, 2000:24).

(iii) *Eschatological emphasis*

This characteristic is critical to apocalyptic literature where an end in history is emphasised. Strand (1979:18) highlights this emphasis on eschatology, stating that “history is moving toward an end at which God Himself will directly intervene to destroy evil and establish righteousness, to a time when God will vindicate His people who so

often are downtrodden during the present era.” He adds that this cosmic sweep has a “peculiarly transcendental focus.”

Robinson (2007, as cited in Porter, 2007:16) agrees that the nature of apocalyptic has a distinct eschatological emphasis, arguing that “apocalyptic literature emphasizes both a transcendent or supernatural world and universal or a cosmological outlook that goes beyond specific situations toward the end of history and eschatological salvation.” Davidson (2007, as cited in Du Preez, 2007:45) states that “general, classical prophecy has as its primary focus local, national, contemporary scenes and events,” while in contrast the “primary focus of apocalyptic is upon the universal sweep of history with an emphasis upon the end-time” (Davidson, 2007, as cited in Du Preez, 2007:45). Robinson (2007, as cited in Porter, 2007:16) presents God as “present working in history and focus on his cataclysmic intervention in bringing history to an end, the final judgment and the destruction of the wicked”. Uniquely, apocalyptic not only focuses on “futurity, some also interpret past or present events” (Robinson, 2007, as cited in Porter, 2007:16). According to Spencer (2005, as cited in Vanhoozer, 2005:438–439), this eschatological emphasis “announces the climactic triumph of the kingdom of God over hostile earthly kingdoms, calling readers to view contemporary struggles eschatologically.”

Fiddes (2000:26) refers to the prophecies in the Book of Daniel in which world events are traced and which later have the writer “launching into the future, predicting”. Moltmann (1996:227), describing these apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel, quotes from Daniel 2 that says “the kingdoms of this world are crushed by a stone” and Daniel 7 which refers to the kingdoms of the world rising up, but God giving the empire of the world to the “Son of man”. Moltmann (1996:227) concludes with the passage from Daniel which declares, “His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away.”

Within the apocalyptic literature of Daniel and Revelation we find a focus on the end of human history “as God brings about closure to the present world order and ushers in His reign” (Johnson, 2001, as cited in Dederen, 2001:788–789).

(iv) *Implied ethic*

Ethic is not considered often in the context of apocalyptic, but this is an important characteristic. Strand (1979:18) states that it is an “implied ethic” which “underlies all its major portrayals and is pervasive in its tone and attitude.”

Hays (2007:38) agrees that there is an ethical focus within the nature of apocalyptic, referring to the world system which tempts believers to compromise, but that they are called to holy and blameless living. Expanding hereupon, Migliore (2004:348) contends that the eschatological symbols of Christian hope, namely the coming of Christ in glory, “are both spiritually and ethically profound.” For Migliore (2004:348) it is regrettable that the church to a large extent has lost the link between Christian hope and Christian ethics. He strongly believes that it is imperative that this link be recovered in our time. He also motions that the relationship of Christian hope and Christian ethics should be expressed more, arguing that “hope in God permeates the life discipleships, and the life of discipleship drives us back again and again to hope in God” (Migliore, 2004:348).

(v) *Origin in times of distress and perplexity*

According to Strand (1979:18), this formative attribute of apocalyptic speaks out of an experience. He explains as follows: “Apocalyptic literature tends to arise in times of distress, perplexity, and persecution. ... a kind of literature which is particularly suited to give comfort to oppressed and downtrodden servants of God.”

In the same vein, Robinson (2007, as cited in Porter, 2007:16) states that apocalyptic prophecy is “frequently directed to God’s loyal people for edification in the midst of crisis.” Spencer (2005, as cited in Vanhoozer, 2005:438) agrees that apocalyptic originates during a time of crisis or oppression, while Johnson (2001, as cited in Dederen, 2001:787) points out that this especially applies to the apocalyptic literature of Daniel and Revelation.²⁸

²⁸ “Daniel received his messages while in exile. Jerusalem and the Temple lay in ruins, and most of the people of Judah had been deported to Babylon. John had also been forced into exile. Despair, crisis, and

Bauckham (1988, as cited in Ferguson, 1988:34) affirm this, stating that these messages, which helped to sustain faith in times of crisis and persecution, assure believers that God is in control of history, despite the apparent dominance of evil in the world, and will bring it to a triumphant end. Johnson (2001, as cited in Dederen, 2001:787) concurs that “[u]ltimately the divine purpose would triumph, God’s people would be vindicated, and the divine kingdom established.” He concludes that since it was given from a setting of suffering to the reader of apocalyptic, its message provides comfort and hope (Johnson, 2001, as cited in Dederen, 2001:787).

(vi) *Basis in visions and dreams*

Strand (1979:18) asserts that reference to visions and dreams are more frequent in apocalyptic than in any other kind of literature found in the Bible.

Robinson (2007, as cited in Porter, 2007:16) concurs that apocalyptic messages are generally conveyed through dreams and visions, while McGrath (2011:445) also points out the emphasis often placed on the role of visions and dreams through which the secret plans of God were communicated. In similar fashion, Fiddes (2000:24) refers to revelation which has been received through a vision (including otherworldly dream journeys) or the mediation of angels.

This is different from classical prophecy where the primary source of revelation is “the Word of the Lord” and is received by the inspired prophet, as Davidson (2007, as cited in Du Preez, 2007:50) indicates. The author refers to Daniel 2, 7 and 8 to illustrate that the basis of apocalyptic revelation is usually the giving of visions or dreams and to Daniel 7:15–27; 8:15–26; 9:21–27; 10:10–21; 11:1–45; 12:1–4 and 9–13 to show that this is often accompanied by an angel interpreter.

persecution are the backdrop to both books. The purpose of the messages given to both visionaries under such circumstances was to assure them that, contrary to all appearances, God was still in control of history” (Johnson, 2001, as cited in Dederen, 2001:787).

To add, Davidson (2007, as cited in Du Preez, 2007:50) demonstrates that the vision in the entire Book of Revelation was “sent and signified ... *by His angel* to His servant John” (1:1), and that the book is largely composed of “vision and audition”.²⁹

(vii) *Extensive use of symbolism*³⁰

Apocalyptic is distinctly enveloped in symbolism (Strand, 1979:18).

Robinson (2007, as cited in Porter, 2007:16) confirms that apocalyptic nature employs “abundant imagery, signs and cryptic symbolism,” while Spencer (2005, as cited in Vanhoozer, 2005:438) depicts the nature of apocalyptic as “divine revelation that humans receive in highly symbolic visions.” Apocalyptic symbolism will be elaborated upon in the next section.

(viii) *Use of composite symbolism*³¹

The rare phenomenon of composite symbolism is almost unique to apocalyptic, according to Strand (1979:18). He explains that it differs from the conventional frame of reference in that it makes use of pictures of animals that are non-existent in nature, for instance.

Letseli (2009:23) provides examples from the Books of Daniel and Revelation where horns and eagles speak, iron can be mixed with clay, leopards can have four heads, and dragons can chase women through the sky. Hays (2007:374) also refers to fantastic visions and bizarre characters in composite symbolism and echoes Letseli, stating that “we read of four living creatures covered with eyes and wings, a red dragon with seven heads and ten horns, locusts with human faces and tails that sting like scorpions, and so on.” Hays (2007:38) also writes, “[R]eaders encounter strange and bizarre picture

²⁹ Richard Davidson (2007, as cited in Du Preez, 2007:50): “e.g., Rev 1:10: ‘I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day;’ Rev 4:1: ‘come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this;’ and the numerous statements of John which structure much of the book: ‘And he showed me...,’ ‘And I saw...,’ ‘And I heard...’”

³⁰ Strand (1979:19): “General prophecy uses symbolism to some degree, but apocalyptic literature is thoroughly permeated with symbols of various sorts.”

³¹ Strand (1979:19): “[I]t makes use of pictures of animals that are non-existent in nature, such as the seven-headed dragon and beasts in Revelation 12, 13, and 17. Composite symbolism of this sort was common, however, in the art and literature of the ancient Near East.”

language that they see nowhere else in Scripture ... they are often combined in apocalyptic literature in ways that make them extraordinary.”

Johnson (2001, as cited in Dederen, 2001:788) explains this amalgamated imagery as follows: “Composite, vivid, and extensive imagery is woven into the tapestry of the messages of both Daniel and the revelator.” He too describes this animatory character of apocalyptic, where we see winged lions and leopards; a little horn with eyes and mouth; one like a son of man with hair white like wool, eyes like blazing fire, feet like bronze glowing in a furnace, and a voice sounding like rushing waters; locusts with the appearance of horses and faces like human faces, hair like women’s hair, and teeth like lions’ teeth (Dan. 7:4, 6; Rev. 1:12–16; 9:7–9).

Trafton (2005:11) explains that in composite imagery, various symbols are combined into a new unit. To illustrate this, the author refers to the image of the four living creatures in Revelation 4, which demonstrates how John has combined images from both Isaiah and Ezekiel to create something new. De Souza (2020:7) also makes the comparison between classical prophecy, with its limited amount of symbolism, mainly involving symbols that are true to life and taken from nature, and apocalyptic prophecy with its symbols and imagery “beyond the world of human reality,” which Davidson (2007, as cited in Du Preez, 2007:47) calls “a profusion of symbolism, often involving composite symbols”.

(ix) *Eschatology from outside of history*

Adding to the nature of apocalyptic is an important characteristic contributed by Davidson (2007, as cited in Du Preez, 2007:46) who argues that

[i]n classical prophecy, eschatology and the windup of the Great Controversy is depicted as occurring largely from within history, utilizing God’s people, national, geo-political, ethnic Israel. But apocalyptic eschatology describes a final universal in-breaking of God from outside of history, bringing an end to human history as we know it.

Moltmann (1993:134), explaining the difference between classical and apocalyptic prophecy, lists six characteristics of apocalyptic prophecy and, amongst others, affirms that eschatology comes into history as that which will be without change.

In apocalyptic the factor standing over against the God who acts in history is the 'world' that lies under the power of evil. In the prophets, however, we have 'Israel and the nations'... The judgment is not seen as something which in the freedom of God can be recalled and which can be averted, if it may be, by repentance, but as an immutable fate that is assuredly coming, as a *fatum irreparabile*.

According to Davidson (2007, as cited in Du Preez, 2007:46), this characteristic indicates the fundamentally different divine perspective between classical and apocalyptic literature. The author explains that, whereas classical literature reveals God's original plan for the world, "what *might have been*", "apocalyptic prophecy reveals that God is not taken by surprise, but knows in detail what will happen, what the human choices will be." The Books of Daniel and Revelation therefore reveal what will be.

The futurity in apocalyptic shows the God outside of history who has worked within history in the classical prophetic sense, but will break into history "from somewhere beyond history" and bring "an end to the history" (Moltmann, 1993:15). In similar fashion, Fiddes (2000:25) suggests that apocalyptic eschatology "envisages the end of history and cosmos" where "God will bring the divine purposes to completion." Russell (1989:15) writes, "Such prophecies declare not a predetermined programme which is to work itself out... with exact precision...but rather a divine principle which sees God in control of events rather than events in control of God." In league with such notion, Fiddes (2000:25) equates apocalypses as genre having "a strong momentum towards the organization and unification of history from the perspective of the end." He subscribes this to the intention of God and relates such intention as constituting the secret of the universe (Fiddes, 2000:25). In addition, Moltmann (1996:22) relates this future momentum of God to the crucified and resurrected Christ, arguing that "[t]he raising of Christ from the dead presupposes his real and total death." Moltmann (1996:227) thus believes that Christian apocalyptic takes its bearings from the fact that Christ's real end was his true beginning.

This then translates to and interprets futurity in biblical apocalyptic where “there is no beginning of a new world without the end of this old one,” as there “is no rebirth of the cosmos without the ‘the birth pangs of the End-time’” (Moltmann, 1996:227). “In the expression of such hope,” according to Fiddes (2000:25–26), “heaven and earth merge together, the transcendent and the mundane combine, and this age coalesces with the age to come.” What does apocalyptic thus bring forth? Moltmann (2000:26) answers that events of past history leading up to the present moment are arranged into a significant pattern resulting in giving “the reader confidence that the leap into the future consummation will also take place.”

(x) *Divine sovereignty and unconditionality*

Concluding his definition of apocalyptic, De Souza (2020:7) adds that, unlike classical prophecies which rely on human response, apocalyptic prophecies rest on “God’s foreknowledge and sovereignty and will happen regardless of human choices.”

Hays (2007:374) confirms the inherent divine sovereignty within biblical apocalyptic by referring to the situation of crisis and growing hopelessness revealed in Revelation, where God’s people are facing difficult times as hostile powers threaten to overwhelm them. Yet, despite this contextual hopelessness, God is depicted as sovereign and trustworthy.

Such divine sovereignty is demonstrated through prophecy that reveals God’s control over history. Davidson (2007, as cited in Du Preez, 2007:51) explains it by contrasting classical prophecy with apocalyptic, suggesting that “[i]n classical prophecy, conditionality is a fundamental feature, as two possible scenarios are delineated to the prophet’s own generation, the way of blessing or curses, dependent on the covenant response of the people,” whereas “[i]n the predictive sections of both Daniel and Revelation there is a lack of the conditional element.” For instance, God’s sovereignty and control over history are revealed as Daniel is shown “not what might be before Israel and other nations, but (from the vantage point of God’s foreknowledge) what will be” (Davidson, 2007, as cited in Du Preez, 2007:51). Thus, within apocalyptic, “[t]here is no presentation of the alternatives of blessings and curses for obedience or rebellion,” because in apocalyptic “God reveals

in unbroken succession the rise and fall of nations” (Davidson, 2007, as cited in Du Preez, 2007:51).

Similarly, Moltmann (1993:133) upholds that classic prophecy is conditional. This conditionality is disparately distinguished by Moltmann (1993:133) from the unconditionality of apocalyptic prophecy. “As distinct from any fatalistic apocalyptic view of history, the mobility of history as the prophets see it, and as they stand in it with their own witness, can therefore be called ‘a purposeful conversation of the Lord of the future with Israel’” (Moltmann, 1993:133). However, Gulley (2016:496) criticises Moltmann’s view on God’s past sovereignty especially revealed within apocalyptic, reasoning that, for Moltmann to champion the sovereignty of God, he seems to “assume that God is free to do anything He desires in future events and is apparently not even bound by the Bible.” Gulley (2016:496) asks in response whether God had not been sovereign and free when He predicted what He would do in future events in the Bible. The author questions the value of any defense of God’s future sovereignty if, as he puts it, “it destroys His past sovereignty.”

As noted earlier, various approaches to apocalyptic interpretation exist. In the light of apocalyptic nature, as depicted by the characteristics discussed above, an Apocalyptic Analysis is proposed to measure the different apocalyptic interpretation schools by posing the following: *Is this interpretation in harmony with the Apocalypse’s striking contrasts, cosmic sweep, eschatological emphasis, and implied ethic? And is this interpretation recognising the Apocalypse’s origin in times of distress, basis in visions and dreams, extensive use of symbolism, use of composite symbolism, eschatology from outside of history, and divine sovereignty and unconditionality?*

These will be applied in the apocalyptic analysis of preterism, futurism and historicism in the next three chapters.

2.2.3 A prophetic image analysis

Within the first three verses, the Apocalypse reads: “signified it by his angel”. The word ‘signify’³² in Greek is *σημαίνω* (*semainō*), which means ‘to show by sign or indicate’. The Book of Revelation is thus phrased and clothed with symbolism³³. According to Hays (2007:37), the purpose of this transcendent symbolic world depicted by Revelation is to transform the readers’ whole way of thinking in order to change their normal perspective on the world to a heavenly perspective. These prophetic images therefore open up the mind to a new heavenly dimension which alters how they viewed the world before. This is why Hays (2007:38) concludes that “Revelation provides Christians with a set of ‘prophetic counter-images’ to purge their imagination of the pagan view of the world and replace it with a mind-set of what things will be like” in God’s kingdom and paradigm.

With the Apocalypse being highly symbolical, understanding how to translate this imagery is imperative. Davidson (2007, as cited in Du Preez, 2007:47) refers to symbols as timeless representations of truth and provides examples such as a lamb symbolising innocence and a horn symbolising strength. Moreover, as Davidson (2007, as cited in Du Preez, 2007:47) also points out, biblical symbolism has specific meanings attached to it within scripture, for example the sanctuary lamb which symbolises Christ the Lamb of God (John 1:29). More so within apocalyptic. A symbol in apocalyptic context, according to Letseli (2009:23), is anything that represents something other than what it normally is, and as such, mere logic or literal reading is not sufficient. For instance, Letseli (2009:24) mentions that in the Book of Revelation, the lion is a lamb, death is a victory, and the victim is the victor. Therefore, for the interpretation of Revelation, it is critical to grasp that

³² Stefanovic (2019:7) reveals: “This word is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) in which Daniel explains to King Nebuchadnezzar that, by the statue made of gold, silver, bronze, and iron, God signifies to the king ‘what will take place in the future’ Dan. 2:25, NASB). By employing the same word, John tells us that the scenes and events of Revelation were shown to him in vision in symbolic presentations.”

Davidson (2007, as cited in Du Preez, 2007:48) states that “[i]n the book of Revelation, the introduction (Rev 1:1) indicates that the entire book has been ‘signified’ (*sēmainō*) by Christ to John...”.

³³ Strand (1979:25) defines symbolism as “any description which is intended to represent something other than what it normally, commonly, or usually designates or depicts”.

the book is ‘signified or given in symbolism’. In this respect, Stefanovic (2019:7) argues as follows:

Thus, for the most part, the language used to describe Revelation’s prophecies must not be interpreted literally. As a rule, the reading of the Bible, in general, presupposes a literal understanding of the text (unless the text points to intended symbolism). But when we read Revelation – unless the text points to a literal meaning – we need to interpret it symbolically. While the scenes and events predicted are real, they usually were expressed in symbolic language.³⁴

Furthermore, the symbolism in Revelation is unique. Letseli (2009:42) suggests that it is “difficult, if not impossible” to physically portray some of these images.³⁵ The author concludes, “It is as if the images of Revelation were designed to be heard more than to be visualized, a feast for the ear more than the eye” (Letseli, 2009:42).

Concerning the translation of these apocalyptic symbols, Strand (1979:25) remarks that it is imperative to recognise them for what they are, the reason for using them must be understood, and they must be interpreted “in relationship to both (1) their conventional meanings at the time of writing, and (2) the immediate literary context (textual setting) in which they appear.”

Adding to this, Strand (1979:28) notes that “[s]ymbols are picturesquely descriptive; as such they are fluid, not static, in nature.” He then lists four variants to this that should be kept in mind in interpretation, namely (Strand, 1979:28):

- (1) The same symbol may signify different things in different contexts. (2) Different symbols may be used to represent the same thing. (3) A symbolic

³⁴ Letseli (2009:24) echoes this crucial principle: “In the rest of New Testament the language is to be taken as literal unless careful investigation indicates that a symbol is intended, in Revelation the opposite is the case. The language of Revelation is to be taken as symbolic or figurative unless careful investigation indicates that the language must be understood in literal terms.”

³⁵ “It is difficult, if not impossible to portray a figure with bronze feet glowing as if in a furnace, with a sword coming out of his mouth, with seven actual stars in his hands, and with a voice that sounds like a trumpet at one point and like a mighty cataract a moment later” (Letseli, 2009:42).

pattern may contain variation of symbols depicting the same thing within the same context. (4) Details may vary in what are apparently the same symbols.

To analyse how and if interpretations are interpreting symbols properly, one should first determine whether the symbol was accurately detected. How does one detect a symbol in complex image filled literature like that of the Apocalypse? Letseli (2009:30–31) proposes the following seven key principles:

- The formal linking of two words of totally different meaning, for instance “the seven lampstands are the seven churches”.
- The use of a key descriptive term to alert the reader to the presence of some unusual meaning, for instance “the mystery of the seven stars”.
- The impossibility of a literal interpretation, for instance “I ate the book”.
- The statement would be outrageously false or contradictory when taken literally, for instance “my two witnesses are the two olive trees and the two lampstands”.
- Context that renders a literal interpretation probable.
- Clear and repeated figurative use of the same word elsewhere in the book, for instance “Lamb” or “Lion” or “stars”.
- The use of numbers, which are to be taken as symbols more often than not.

Davidson (2007, as cited in Du Preez, 2007:48) warns against arbitrarily considering something as symbolic when it is meant to be taken literally. He further emphasises that some items are to be taken literally at the same time, “as they point symbolically beyond themselves.” To illustrate this, he points out that what is portrayed in Daniel and Revelation regarding what happens in heaven is real, while it also symbolises the gospel realities centred in Jesus.

After determining, which is symbolic, Davidson (2007, as cited in Du Preez 2007:48–49) suggests the following questions for interpreting such imagery:

- Is the interpretation of a given symbol provided in the immediate context of the symbol? (E.g. Dan 8:20–21; Rev 1:20; 4:5, 17:15)
- Is the meaning of the symbol given elsewhere in Scripture?

- Does the symbol have more than one referent in different contexts? (E.g. “lion” which refers to both Christ [Rev 5:5] and Satan [1 Pet 5:8].)
- Are there different symbols that may represent the same thing? (E.g. “lamb” and “lion” in Rev 5:5–6 which both refer to Christ.)
- Does the study of ancient Near Eastern and Greco-Roman symbolism shed light on the biblical symbol? (See commentaries on Daniel and Revelation for sources.)
- Which of the possible meanings of the symbol fits best within the immediate context of the passage under consideration? (Check for compatibility with the leading theme[s] developed in the passage and with the literary context and textual setting.)
- How does this symbol contribute to the overall development of thought and structure in the passage?
- In the composite symbolism, what are the main points of the symbolic presentation? (Note that the symbol cannot be made to ‘stand on all fours’. Some details of the extended symbolism may simply round out the picture; a symbol is by nature a sign or figure that has fluidity and is only representative.)
- What is the historical fulfillment that exactly fits the predictive apocalyptic symbol? (Be careful to let the biblical picture be the controlling factor, not history; also, do not ‘bend’ the historical picture to fit the symbolism.)

Apocalyptic symbols and imagery can only be effectively interpreted within the biblical scope of Bible literature from where they were taken in the first place. In this regard, it is vital that the apocalyptic Book of Daniel be studied in conjunction with Revelation, for as Cooke (2014:2581) indicates, the imagery in Revelation is borrowed from the Old Testament Book of Daniel. In fact, the very first verse of the Apocalypse is based on the Book of Daniel, as Trafton (2005:16) observes, “John has written the first verse against the backdrop of the LXX rendering of the story of God’s revealing to Daniel Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and its interpretation (Dan 2:14–47).” Even the verses that follow are influenced by the Book of Daniel.³⁶ Since Revelation is clearly a further

³⁶ Trafton (2005:16,17) clearly links Daniel to Revelation: “John describes the content of the revelation in two ways. First, it concerns ‘what must soon take place’ (1:1). This expression will be repeated in 22:6b

employment of the Book of Daniel, we find that many of the symbols utilised by John is taken from Daniel. A classic example is the parallels in imagery between Revelation 13 and Daniel 7. Trafton (2005:125) points out that John's observation of the beast like a leopard, its feet like a bear's, and its mouth like a lion's mouth (Rev 13:2) combines elements from the first four beasts in Daniel's vision.³⁷ This provides evidence that one should seek to interpret the imagery of Revelation firstly in the context of the Book of Daniel.

Moreover, it is imperative to consult the Old Testament for the interpretation of apocalyptic symbolism. Bauckham (1993:5) shows how John quotes from the Old Testament and emphasises that he writes in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets, while Hayes (1999:5) indicates that he "understands himself to be writing at the climax of the tradition." Trafton (2005:11) underscores this by declaring that "Revelation breathes Old Testament imagery at virtually every turn." Stefanovic (2019:7) explains that "[b]y portraying the

and, with variations, in 1:19 and in 4:1. The first part of the expression reflects the language of the LXX reading of Dan 2:28 (cf. Dan 2:29). Indeed, John has written the first verse against the backdrop of the LXX rendering of the story of God's revealing to Daniel Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its interpretation (Dan 2:14–47). 'Revelation' recalls the use of the verb 'reveal' (apokalupto) five times in this section of Daniel (Dan 2:28, 29, 30, 47 [twice]). In addition, the verb 'make known' (semaino) occurs four times (Dan 2:15, 23, 30, 45). John's most significant alteration of Daniel is that he changes 'what must take place in the last days' (Dan 2:28; cf. Dan 2:29, 45) to 'what must soon take place'. The implications of this alteration for understanding John's eschatological perspective will become clearer as the reader continues. At this point, it is at least evident that John believes that whatever Daniel may have meant by 'the last days', the revelation that he himself has received is not relegated to the distant future. John reaffirms this thought in 1:3 with the comment that 'the time is near', an observation he will repeat at the end of the book (22:10). The notion of 'the time' as a special time of great eschatological significance is based upon Daniel 7:22 (LXX; cf. Dan 8:17; 9:27; 11:35; 12:4, 7) and is also picked up in the Gospel tradition (Mark 1:14; Luke 21:8)."

³⁷ Trafton (2005:125), in his *Theological and Literary commentary*, draws heavily on Daniel to analyse the imagery within Revelation: "John's description of the first beast draws heavily upon Daniel's vision of the four beasts in Dan 7. As with the four beasts in Daniel, John sees 'a beast [therion] rising [anabaino] out of the sea' (13:1; Dan 7:3; cf. Isa 27:1). The language is similar to 11:7, which speaks of a beast rising (anabaino; RSV "that ascends") out of the Abyss. The natural inference is that this is the same beast, which will be confirmed in 13:7. Therion is a generic term for any kind of wild animal or beast, especially (but not always – cf. Acts 28:3–5) of the four-legged variety (cf. 6:8).

Like Daniel's fourth beast, the beast has 'ten horns' (13:1; Dan 7:7, 20, 24). The further mention of 'seven heads' (13:1) reminds the reader of the dragon in 12:3, which also has ten horns and seven heads and is reminiscent of Daniel's third beast, which has four heads (Dan 7:6). The beast also has 'ten diadems' (13:1). The dragon, by contrast, has seven diadems (12:3). The difference in number is probably due to John's heavy dependence on Dan 7 in this section: the ten horns of Daniel's fourth beast are associated with ten kingdoms (Dan 7:24)."

future in the language of the past, God wanted to impress upon our minds that His acts of salvation in the future will be very much like His acts of salvation in the past. What He did for His people in the past, He will do for them again in the future.”

Lyons³⁸ asserts that about 68.8% of Revelation has direct allusions to the Old Testament. Davidson (2007, as cited in Du Preez, 2007:60) also indicates that out of 404 verses in the Book of Revelation, at least 278 contain allusions (direct or indirect) to the Old Testament.³⁹ He further mentions that in the Book of Revelation there are more than 630 allusions and verbal parallels to passages in the Old Testament.⁴⁰

According to Strand (1979:31), “any methodology that summarily dismisses or radically reinterprets apocalyptic language in Biblical literature is suspect.” It is therefore evident that an adequate prophetic image hermeneutic is critical. Thus, I propose a Prophetic Image Analysis for analysing the various apocalyptic interpretation schools in terms of the way they interpret the symbols within the Apocalypse by posing the following: *Is the symbol recognised as fluid, representative, and may it vary in different contexts? Are the reasons for the symbol used understood? Is the source of the symbol recognised? Is the symbol respected as to its relationship to the main theme wherein it is found? Is the symbol considered within its immediate and literary context?*

These will be applied in the prophetic image analysis of preterism, futurism and historicism in the next three chapters.

2.2.4 An exegetical analysis

Revelation commences referring to “he that reads” and “hear the words of this prophecy”, indicating that this literature will neither be beneficial nor obvious to the casual reader but calls for observation, study and comprehension. The implication is therefore that it could

³⁸ Lyons, E n.d., *Revelation and the Old Testament*, Apologetics Press, viewed 21 January 2020, <<http://apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=11&article=886>>

³⁹ Footnote in the original quote: Henry B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*. New York: Macmillan. 1906. cxi-clviii.

⁴⁰ Footnote in the original quote: Kurt Aland et al. (eds), *The Greek New Testament*, 3rd ed. Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1983, 901–911.

only be exegetically understood. Exegesis in the Greek means to 'lead out' (Mathews, 2012:105) or 'draw out' (Paulien, 1992:82). Paulien (1992:82) defines exegesis as a process where the biblical text can speak for itself, rather than attaching a meaning to it that resonates with the reader, while Mathews (2012:105) describes it as an attempt to offer a critical interpretation of the text. Stefanovic (2002:13) points out that in the interpretation of apocalyptic prophecy, exegesis "is the process of deriving meaning from biblical text by bridging the gap between the world of the Bible at the time of the inspired author and the reader of today."⁴¹ The importance of responsible exegesis of Revelation is emphasised by LaRondelle (2007:153) who warns against a "dogmatic exegesis"⁴² that finds in a text what it is looking for" (LaRondelle 2007:317). In this regard, Trafton (2005:14) proposes that, to "hear what the Spirit says to the churches," all preconceived notions must be laid aside, allowing the text to speak for itself. In addition, LaRondelle (2007:6, 343) advocates a responsible contextual exegesis of each apocalyptic passage. It is thus evident that apocalyptic interpretation requires careful exegetical analysis.

Exploring two key doctrines that underly the approaches of all three apocalyptic interpretation schools, namely the coming of Christ and the coming of Antichrist, a scriptural pericope will now be considered that is employed within and critical to all three of these interpretation schools. Five questions will be utilised of which the answers are evident in the text to compare the different apocalyptic approaches. Having a clear scriptural model will help better measure the different interpretations that have been constructed a priori without the context of these interpretations but with only an exegetical approach. However, it is important to note that this brief study of the pericope will be a specific and synoptic analysis focused on and limited to the five questions. Following the discussion of this brief study, specific and determined evaluative questions will be

⁴¹ Beale (1999:49) argues as follows: "The crucial yet problematic task of the interpreter is to identify through careful exegesis and against the original historical background those texts which pertain respectively to past, present, and future."

⁴² In reference to the Apocalypse, Patterson (2012:47) suggests that those you present your exegesis to "will intuitively know when you do not support an interpretation adequately. They will also note the difference between exegesis and speculation. The latter is not offensive unless such speculation is passed off as exegesis or used to excess."

proposed to analyse the exegesis of this specific scriptural passage in all three interpretation schools.

Pericope under consideration

2 Thessalonians 2:1–12 reveals the coming of Christ and the coming of Antichrist. This text will now be explored by means of five key questions.

Key questions

The key questions utilised to study the scriptural passage are:

- Will the *Parousia* be literal, real and observable, or will it happen in secret or in a spiritual sense?
- What is the order in which the comings of Christ and Antichrist will take place?
- Will the coming of the Antichrist be literal, real and observable, or will it be shrouded in mystery?
- What will be the real and literal impact of the *Parousia* of Christ on the Antichrist?
- Will God or evil be in control of the events of the comings of Christ and the Antichrist?

A discussion of the answers to these questions, as drawn from the text, is presented below.

- (i) *Will the Parousia be literal, real and observable, or will it happen in secret or in a spiritual sense?*

2 Thessalonians 2:1–2 reads,

Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.

The Greek word for ‘coming’ in the phrase “concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” is *παρουσία* (*parousia*), meaning ‘the state of being present at a place’, ‘presence’

and ‘arrival as the first stage in presence’, ‘coming’, ‘advent’ (Arndt, 2000:780). The original meaning of this word therefore clearly points to a literal and physical appearance of the person coming, as *παρουσία* denotes an active presence (Kittel, 1964:859). Most commentators agree that this word is often used in the New Testament when referring to the eschatological second advent of Jesus Christ, the promised eschaton. This is underscored by Kittel (1964:870) who concurs that “[t]he parousia, in which history is anchored, is not a historical event.”

This future event is further described in the text as “our gathering together to Him”, showing the essence of what will transpire during this eschatological happening. The Greek word for ‘gathering together’ is ἐπισυναγωγή⁴³ (*episynagōgē*), meaning ‘the congregation gathered for worship’ (Kittel, 1964:842). Therefore, while *parousia* points to a literal and physical appearance of the person coming, *episynagōgē* also denotes a literal event of assembling and gathering to Christ. In the same vein, Louw (2020:198) describes *episynagōgē* as “the gathering together of a group ... in the active rather than in the passive sense.” Further to this, Kittel (1964:842) observes that ἐπισυναγωγή occurs twice in the New Testament and that in both instances the context in which it appears confirms the eschatological orientation.

The text then refers to the church in Thessalonica being “shaken in mind”. Eiselen (1929:1271) maintains that this was caused either by a misunderstanding or a misinterpretation of something the apostles had said or written. Clarke (1857:565), on the other hand, suggests that the Thessalonians were encouraged by deceived or false teachers to misinterpret the words of the first epistle, convincing them that that day was at hand. The author believes that the apostle sent them this second letter to address this great confusion and to correct the mistake. Nichol (1980:261–262) proposes that Paul was informed of a “feverish, fanatical spirit of unrest spreading among the members at Thessalonica owing to a feeling that the Lord’s advent was about to take place”; thus, he

⁴³ Martin (1995:223–224) suggests: “‘Our being gathered to him’ includes a word for gathering (*episynagōgē*) that is unusual in the New Testament. The cognate verb *episynagō* is slightly more common. In the Old Testament literature of the exile the verb is sometimes used of the future, glorious ‘gathering’ of Israel (e.g., Isa 52:12). The gospel writers seem to reflect this eschatological use of the verb.”

was convinced that the condition required immediate attention to protect those “humble Christians” from falling prey to deceiving agitators.

Wohlberg (2001:17) is of the opinion that these Christians, upon reading Paul’s letter, became very excited about the return of Christ.⁴⁴ However, as with any excitement about the end, it may tend to develop into extremity.⁴⁵ The author therefore believes that they started to espouse “an extreme view” (Wohlberg, 2001:17),⁴⁶ namely the mistaken concept that the Day of Christ was about to come very soon, was at hand, or had even already come in some sort of secret, spiritual way (see 2 Thessalonians 2:2, KJV; NKJV). Consequently, some of these Christians quit their jobs and withdrew from normal living (see 2 Thessalonians 3:10–12), which, according to Wohlberg (2001:17), is one of the main reasons Paul decided to write his second letter, telling them not to be “soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come” (2 Thessalonians 2:2).

Paul clearly wrote this epistle to make sure that the believers were not believing in some secret coming of Christ “as though the day of Christ had come”. Williams (1994:949) comments that Paul, having quieted their hearts as to their present sufferings, now assures them that the coming of the Lord with its terrors and judgments had not yet set in. Nichol (1980:262) adds that in the context of Paul’s first epistle to the Thessalonians, many seem to have understood the emphasis upon the second advent as indicating that

⁴⁴ Ellingworth (1976:159) argues that, like most Christians in the generation following the death of Jesus, they are living in a state of high expectation that Jesus would soon return and the final judgment would take place. Paul shares these beliefs. His only concern is that the Thessalonians do not become so excited that they accept without question anything they might hear or read on this subject.

⁴⁵ Wanamaker (1990:237–238) notes: “Since the Thessalonian Christians were a persecuted community with a powerful conviction that the end of the present order was at hand, it is not surprising that they raised questions regarding the public manifestation of Christ and when it would occur. False starts have been a common phenomenon among movements predicting the imminent end of the age as people’s expectations exceed their patience.”

⁴⁶ Larson (2000:105) comments, “These false reports were also causing alarm. This is an even stronger word conveying fright, perhaps even shock and panic. Whether these reports were from false teachers or those with overactive imaginations, Paul mentioned three sources of disturbance: prophecy, report, and letter.”

Christ's return was expected almost immediately (see 2 Thess. 2:2) and that Paul now hastens to explain that this was not his meaning.

From the above it is evident that 2 Thessalonians 2:1–2 reveals the *Parousia* to be a literal, real and observable event which cannot be a secret or merely a spiritual event.

(ii) *What is the order in which the comings of Christ and the Antichrist will take place?*

2 Thessalonians 2:3–4 reads,

Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

Reflecting on the key phrase, “that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first”, Williams (1994:948) highlights how Paul reminded the believers that the Day of the Lord would be preceded by the appearing of the Antichrist. Although the clause “that Day will not come” does not appear in the original Greek, the translators added it as it is clearly indicated by the text and context. Martin (1995:231) reasons that inserting this clause fills the ellipsis to complete what would otherwise be an incomplete sentence. This clause which is not in the original Greek is followed by the word ‘unless’ (ἐάν in the Greek) jumping from ‘for’.⁴⁷

Martin (1995:231) argues that the translators are correct in supplying the mentioned clause as Paul's flow of thought is shown by the preceding statement of his topic. The author reasons that Paul most likely intended readers to complete the negative

⁴⁷ Lange (2008:127) reflects hereupon and opines as follows: “The protasis with ἐάν has no apodosis, as often happens with Paul; so Rom. 2:17, according to the best reading; he lost sight of it in the course of the long description; sometimes also (Rom. 9:22) there lies in the ellipsis a certain reserve of judgment. Here the very obvious supplement is οὐ μὴ πάρεσται ἡ ἡμέρα, or οὐ δύναται ἐλθεῖν ὁ κύριος, or some such expression. Webster and Wilkinson: “The omission arises from the fact that he is reminding them of communications previously made concerning two future events, and wishes to fix their attention upon that which must precede the other. It may also be regarded as rhetorical, supplied in the Apostle's dictation by a solemn pause, a gesture, and the significant and emphatic delivery of the words ἐάν ... πρῶτον, or as suggesting the sentiment, I am sorry to have it to say it will not come before...”

conditional clause (“unless the apostasy come first and the man of lawlessness is revealed,” NASB) in vv. 3–4 with some such statement as “then the Lord has not (or will not) come” (Martin 1995:231). Since verses 3–4 deny the notion that the day of the Lord has already come, we can safely deduce that “[t]he intent of the author was to list events that refute the teaching that the day of the Lord had arrived” (Martin, 1995:230). Paul utilised a conditional structure to list and elaborate upon proofs in indicating what should precede the *Parousia*. Martin (1995:230) explains that the “conditions are stated first, lest ‘the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed’ (v. 3b)”. Following this, Martin (1995:230) announces that “[t]he ‘then’ clause, however, was left unstated. The NIV clarifies the sentence by adding ‘that day will not come’, which does not occur in the Greek text.” Is the added clause incorrect? Martin (1995:230) maintains that it is not, since “Paul’s intent was to assert that if the things listed have not occurred, then the day of the Lord could not have arrived.” Larson (2000:105) concurs that “[b]efore that great day comes, Paul declared, the rebellion⁴⁸ must occur.” The ‘rebellion’, ‘lawless one’, ‘man of sin’ and ‘son of perdition’ referred to in this pericope of 2 Thessalonians 2 is considered by most futurists and historicists as the Antichrist. Referring to the coming (*Parousia*) of Christ, Nichol (1980:262) explains that Paul here reminds “his readers that he had taught them in person that the apostasy, followed by the appearance of the antichrist, must first take place (see vs. 2, 3, 5).”

The order of the comings of Christ and the Antichrist are thus established. The text is clear that the coming of the Antichrist precedes the coming of Christ. Lange (2008:127) underscores this, stating that the *Parousia* “will not come before” the coming of the Antichrist.

(iii) *Will the coming of the Antichrist be literal, real and observable, or will it be shrouded in mystery?*

2 Thessalonians 2:3–4 reads,

⁴⁸ Larson (2000:105): “The word used here is apostasia, or apostasy.”

Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

The explicit wording in the text, “the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition”, is uncomplicated enough to answer whether the coming of the Antichrist is literal, real and observable. The text clearly indicates that when the Antichrist is revealed, it will be observable. The text further states emphatically that he will sit in the temple of God, “showing himself that he is God”. The word ‘showing’ in the original Greek is ἀποδείκνυμι (*apodeiknumi*), which means to exhibit or display, clearly denoting a literal and observable reality. It also means to attest and to prove, which removes any shroud of mystery. Louw (2020:342) removes any further doubt that may exist regarding the Antichrist or his coming being some mystical or figurative element when he translates ἀποδείκνυμι as “to cause something to be known publicly – to show publicly, to demonstrate publicly.” It is thus evident that the Antichrist will not only be revealed in no uncertainty, but he will also manifest himself to be seen.

In further support, 2 Thessalonians 2:8–9 reads,

...revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan with all power, signs, and lying wonders...

Verse 8 refers to Christ’s coming by using the word *parousia* in the original Greek, while verse 9 uses the same word for the “coming of the lawless one”. The word *παρουσία* (*parousia*) in its original meaning clearly points to a literal and physical appearance of the person coming, as “παρουσία denotes esp. active presence” (Kittel, 1964:859). Hence, the coming of the Antichrist is declared as a very literal event – it is real and will be observable and not shrouded in mystery.

(iv) *What will be the real and literal impact of the Parousia of Christ on the Antichrist?*

2 Thessalonians 2:5-8 reads,

Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.

Most commentators would agree that Paul is still describing and explaining here the *Parousia* of Christ, as that is the subject matter of the confusion in Thessalonica after his first epistle that dealt with it in detail, but which was misconstrued. Earlier, Paul had made it clear that before the *Parousia* can come, the Antichrist's *parousia* will first transpire. Considering this, he now states that the *Parousia* of Christ that will follow the coming of the Antichrist will destroy this very lawless one. The impact of Christ's *Parousia* on the Antichrist is destruction. Speaking of this destruction, Lange (2008:130) contends that the Antichrist "thus becomes νῖὸς ἀπωλείας" and points out that Paul offers the consolation of its destruction immediately after the mention of his appearance. Utter destruction is portrayed by the word καταργεῖν, which means to destroy, abolish (Lange, 2008:130).

The text says that Christ will consume or "overthrow" [*anelei*] him 'with the breath of his mouth'" (Martin, 1995:243). Lange (2008:130) highlights that "[n]othing is required but the breath of the Lord, which has power." According to Martin (1995:243), this is an allusion to Isaiah 11:4, which asserts of the coming descendant of Jesse, "[W]ith the breath of his lips he will slay (*anelei*, LXX) the wicked." Green (2002:319–320) describes that in this "allusion to this oracle, the apostle uses the word *breath* and the verb *destroy* from the second clause in Isaiah 11:4, and he also changes the object of the judgment from 'the ungodly one' to *the lawless one*." Furthermore, Green (2002:320) explains how Paul is trying to underline the totality of this judgment on the Antichrist by utilising the words

‘overthrow’ and ‘destroy’ to indicate how its power will be broken and it will be killed violently.⁴⁹

Christ will not only consume or overthrow the Antichrist by the breath of his power but “[i]n a parallel clause Paul asserted that the Lord Jesus will ‘destroy’ (*katargēsei*) the lawless one ‘by the splendor of his coming’” (Martin, 1995:243). This destruction is not just a singular destruction but a “destruction of all ‘dominion, authority and power’ (1 Cor. 15:24; cf. 1 Cor. 15:24–26, where the verb *katargeō* is used twice), clearing the way for the establishing of the Lord’s reign” (Martin, 1995:243). Green (2002:320) also asserts that Christ will effect this judgment “by the splendor of his coming,” and points out how this event is mentioned repeatedly in these letters (1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:1). The author further indicates how in specific passages in the New Testament Christ’s coming is described as his ‘epiphany’⁵⁰ (*ἐπιφάνεια* - *epiphaneia*), as in the present verse (1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 1:10; 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13) (Green, 2002:320). Green (2002) then offers some background to the word *epiphaneia* which provides crucial information in establishing the complete destruction of the Antichrist. Green (2002:320) explains that “in the ancient world, a god’s epiphany was the manifestation of the deity by revealing himself or by some demonstration of his power.”⁵¹ The author illuminates that “the epiphany of the *Lord Jesus* will be so powerful that it will *destroy* the *lawless one* and his power” (Green, 2002:320).

⁴⁹ “At that time the *Lord Jesus* will overthrow the *lawless one*, an expression that indicates that he will kill him violently and so break his power. The point is not merely that he will be overthrown from his position, as the *NIV* may imply. Moreover, the author adds that the Lord will *destroy* this *lawless one*. Paul uses this verb again and again when describing the final judgment (1 Cor. 2:6; 6:13; 15:24, 26; 2 Tim. 1:10; and see Heb. 2:14); it signifies that the power of the one who is judged will be annulled and destroyed” (Green, 2002:320).

⁵⁰ Martin (1995:243) states, “The ‘splendor’ (*epiphaneia*) of his ‘coming’ (*parousia*) uses two terms for appearance. ‘Splendor’ is used only here and in the Pastorals, where it refers to the ‘appearing’ of Christ (1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 1:10; 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13).”

⁵¹ “This event would be particularly associated with the *coming* (*parousia*) of the deity. The ancients could even speak of the epiphany of the emperor as a component of the imperial cult. The epiphany of a deity was frequently associated with the manifestation of his divine power to rescue or save a community or an individual, and it was an important component in the accreditation of the god and the establishment of worship in his honor” (Green, 2002:320).

The real and literal impact of the *Parousia* of Christ on the Antichrist can therefore be deduced with certainty, namely that it will totally destroy the Antichrist.

(v) *Who will be in control over these end events of the comings of Christ and the Antichrist?*

In determining who will have control over end events, the whole pericope of 2 Thessalonians 2 will be briefly studied. This notion will be further be expounded on in the concluding chapter where certain positions will be proposed that will include some of these findings. The reflection that follows here will be focused on showing how this pericope of 2 Thessalonians 2 indicates that Satan and his working (like that of the Antichrist) will be influencing end events, but that God is the One who is ultimately in control of such events.

2 Thessalonians 2:1–2 reads,

Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.

The text indicates that Christ will come in God's time and not according to people's expectation or paranoia, as noted earlier.

2 Thessalonians 2:3–4 reads,

Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

The Antichrist is revealed as the man of sin before he displays himself in public fashion. This revelation (as can be seen in this very textual pericope that has been read by so many Christians and forms part of the revelation) is God exhibiting His power. God is in control of end events.

2 Thessalonians 2:5–8 reads,

Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.

Not getting into the argument of who or what the restrainer is, the text is indicative that God is in control of the restraining power that restrains the Antichrist's power already at work in Paul's day. God is in control of end events.

2 Thessalonians 2:8 reads,

And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.

God will reveal the Antichrist's power before his coming and at his coming destroy it. God is in control of end events.

2 Thessalonians 2:9 reads,

The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders...

As those who are lost is universal, so the Antichrist's work of deception will be universal and lead many astray. When read in isolation, the text seems to suggest that the evil one is in control; yet, in the context of the next three verses it becomes apparent that although the Antichrist will assume some control by its deception, God has ultimate control over end events.

2 Thessalonians 2:10 reads as follows,

...and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

The text is clear that those who are deceived by the Antichrist had to reject truth in order to be lost. God is in control of end events. Not evil.

2 Thessalonians 2:11,12 reads,

And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

God first sends (v.10) truth amidst deception. Then (v.11,12) he allows them to be deceived. This shows that God is not deceiving, but in control of the deception, which establishes that evil does not have authority over the comings of Christ and the Antichrist. God is in control of end events and the end time narrative.

Studying the pericope of 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12, it has been established that the *Parousia* will be literal, real and observable. It will be preceded by the coming and revelation of the Antichrist, which will also be literal, real and observable. Furthermore, it has been shown beyond doubt that the *Parousia* will destroy the Antichrist as God will have the ultimate authority over the end events.

The importance of responsible exegesis of apocalyptic passages has been highlighted at the beginning of this section. Utilising what has been established in this section regarding the *Parousia* and the coming of the Antichrist, the following questions are proposed for the exegetical analysis of the different apocalyptic interpretation schools: *Does this interpretation view the Parousia to be literal, real and observable and as being preceded by the coming and revelation of the Antichrist? Does this interpretation view the coming of the Antichrist to be literal, real and observable and view the Parousia as destroying the Antichrist? Does this interpretation view God to be in control of end events?*

These will be applied in the exegetical analysis of preterism, futurism and historicism in the next three chapters.

2.2.5 A practical relevance analysis

Lastly, we find within the first three verses of Revelation the expression “keep those things which are written therein,” which denotes a practical application, relevant to the reader. Thus, a practical relevance hermeneutic is proposed that provides relevant hope and sense to the present of the reader of the Apocalypse. Migliore (2004:348) declares, “The symbols of Christian hope – the coming of Christ in glory, the resurrection of the dead, the last judgment, the promise of eternal life, and the warning of eternal death – are both spiritually and ethically profound.” Hence, eschatology that reflects the Christian hope is practically relevant.

True Christian hope is received by faith, for it is faith that “binds man to Christ” (Moltmann, 1993:20); thus, hope is the “inseparable companion” of faith (Moltmann, 1993:20).⁵² What is hope if nothing without faith?⁵³ Moltmann (1993:20) declares that it is the expectation of those things which faith has believed to have been truly promised by God. Moltmann (1993:20) offers the following theological breakdown of faith and hope (italicising supplied):

Faith believes God to be true, *hope* awaits the time when this truth shall be manifested; *faith* believes that he is our Father, *hope* anticipates that he will ever show himself to be a Father toward us; *faith* believes that eternal life has been given to us, *hope* anticipates that it will sometime be revealed; *faith* is the foundation on which hope rests, *hope* nourishes and sustains faith.

So, what can be experienced in our present, brought to the forefront by the twins, faith and hope? As faith brings about and kindles hope, hope upholds and sustains faith.

⁵² The author places the same emphasis on hope that theologians have exclusively put on faith. McGrath (2011:454) shows that Moltmann elevates hope in significant modification within established theology, stating the following: “Moltmann’s attitude of orientation toward the future, defined and informed by the promises of God, is summarized in slogans such as *spes quaerens intellectum* and *spero, ut intellegam* (‘hope seeking understanding’ and ‘I hope, in order that I may understand’). Each of these phrases represents a significant modification of the viewpoint of Anselm of Canterbury, who emphasized the importance of faith, and was summarized in the slogans *fides quaerens intellectum* and *credo, ut intellegam* (‘faith seeking understanding’ and ‘I believe, in order that I may understand’).”

⁵³ Faith cannot without hope, as hope cannot without faith, for “[w]hen this hope is taken away, however eloquently or elegantly we discourse concerning faith, we are convicted of having none” (Moltmann, 1993:20).

Therefore, Moltmann (1993:20) finds that “in the Christian life faith has the priority, but hope the primacy”. This hope received by faith infuses hope into the present situation of the believer.

Moltmann (1993:20) asserts that hope becomes a utopia without faith’s knowledge of Christ, while without hope, “faith falls to pieces” (Moltmann, 1993:20). Moltmann (1993:20) thus concludes that “[i]t is through faith that man finds the path of true life, but it is only hope that keeps him on that path.” Moltmann (1993:20) emphasises that with Christ being the object of faith, the result of faith is hope that brings the assurance which will transform the circumstances of the present.

Moltmann (1993:22) regards hopelessness as the greatest of sins. We thus need to reconsider the place we have confined eschatology to and give it a place of prominence in order to provide promise to bring about hope and sense. Eschatology, according to Travis (1988, as cited in Ferguson, 1988:231), allows “the perspective of hope to influence the whole of life.” Thus, besides hope infused into the present, eschatology helps one make sense of life.

Moreover, Johnson (2001, as cited in Dederen, 2001:801) reckons that “[b]iblical apocalyptic is not literature of withdrawal from the world. It does not deny the world; rather, it shows how God’s followers are to live in the world.” This includes apocalyptic in the Old Testament. Concerning the Book of Daniel, Johnson (2001, as cited in Dederen, 2001:801) remarks that while half the book is apocalyptic, the other half tells of Daniel’s tests, service, counsel and wisdom, illustrating that “apocalyptic goes hand in hand with service to God and humanity.” Concerning apocalyptic in the New Testament, Johnson (2001, as cited in Dederen, 2001:801) notes that “Matthew 24/Mark 13/Luke 21 dovetail with daily life.” The context of these apocalyptic reveals the practical relevance to daily life, as Johnson (2001, as cited in Dederen, 2001:801) observes, “In Matthew Jesus immediately follows the apocalyptic prediction of the end of the age with instructions on how His followers are to live during the waiting time (Matt. 25).”

Evidently, biblical apocalyptic enhances the lives of believers and receivers as it “reassures, encourages, and warns God’s people as they go about their tasks in this life” (Johnson, 2001, as cited in Dederen, 2001:801), inspiring them to ethical living and

equipping them with the “confidence that God is in control of the flow of history and of their lives” (Johnson, 2001, as cited in Dederen, 2001:801). Therefore, apocalyptic cannot be divorced from the present and the lives lived by believers. Since apocalyptic prophecy was not given in isolation⁵⁴ but was born in times of distress, it will be beneficial to our present lives lived in stress.

It is thus clear that eschatology, especially with regard to apocalyptic, cannot be understood in isolation from our present situation. Eschatology “must formulate its statements of hope in contradiction to our present experience of suffering, evil and death” (Moltmann, 1993:19). Hope should therefore be presented as the “foundation of theological thinking” and “introduce the eschatological perspective into our statements on divine revelation, on the resurrection of Christ, on the mission of faith and on history” (Moltmann 1993:19).

Faith, even in the beyond, is still practical to the present and matters. Moltmann (1993:19) refers to Calvin’s view to explain that “[i]n the contradiction between the word of promise and the experiential reality of suffering and death, faith takes its stand on hope and ‘hastens beyond this world’”.⁵⁵ Such transcendental faith does not mean that the believer oversteps the realities of death, decay and suffering into a heavenly utopia (Moltmann, 1993:19), but helps to make sense of life. Faith in the God of future and promise instills hope and brings light to our present which is often outlined and filled with hopelessness. This future and promise were demonstrated in that Christ died our death and was raised for us. By faith in this Christ that was dead and was raised from the dead to live forever, our outlook and paradigm are shifted past our present “god-forsaken” situation. This is crucial for understanding the effect of eschatology and apocalyptic on the present. Reflecting on this hope, it is critical to formulate a practical relevant hermeneutic for apocalyptic since, as Migliore (2004:348) states, “the church has largely lost the link

⁵⁴ As seen in section 2.2.2 *The nature of apocalyptic literature* under point (v).

⁵⁵ This is a critical aspect Calvin illuminates in Moltmann’s thinking. The question arises whether this means that the believer is eternally focused and becomes other-worldly and of no influence here. Moltmann (1993:19) answers that Calvin “did not mean by this that Christian faith flees the world, but he did mean that it strains after the future”. Yet, there is a transcendent focus in belief that Moltmann (1993:19) emphasises, “To believe does in fact mean to cross and transcend bounds, to be engaged in an exodus.”

between Christian hope and Christian ethics, and it is a matter of urgency that this link be recovered in our time.”

Similar to the interdependency between faith and hope is an interdependency between eschatology and our present living. As shown earlier, hope forth flowing from hope in the risen Christ will protest in the present. Since our hope is in God and not in our own resources, “we are empowered to engage in ministries of consolation, resistance, and transformation” (Migliore, 2004:348). As hope equips us in the present, it does so anticipating God’s promise, for “Christian hope brings to our activities and struggles in this life the passionate expectation of all-encompassing renewal,” according to Migliore (2004:348). Eschatology thus motivates the believer to greater spirituality.

The believer instilled with God’s hope will be an influence of grace. We are unbound from the shackles of injustice within the present to not only be free but to help free. Migliore (2004:349) quotes John Webster who asserts that Christian eschatology is practical, and that Christian hope does not close our eyes to the suffering of the world. Rather, “Christians believe that God cherishes the world, has created and redeemed it, and wills to have abiding communion with it” (Migliore, 2004:349). This portrays eschatological hope, a hope not instilling fear and aversion towards humanity and creation but rather service and care. Succinctly, Migliore (2004:349) states that “[i]f we hope in fulfilled life beyond death, we cannot be indifferent to suffering life before death.”⁵⁶

Migliore (2004:349) highlights that one of the biggest challenges to people inside and outside the church today is to stand in unity with and support those who suffer. We often refrain from standing in solidarity with those who suffer due to being ethical individualists, ethically sensitive family members, or people with a sense of solidarity with our particular class, gender, race, or nation (Migliore, 2004:349). Yet, the selfless love of the triune God that stood at Calvary in solidarity with suffering humanity can free us to stand with the same love and care in solidarity with humanity and creation. God’s promise has a direct

⁵⁶ He quotes Moltmann in this regard. “As Jürgen Moltmann has put it, ‘those who hope in Christ can no longer put up with reality as it is, but begin to suffer under it, to contradict it. Peace with God means conflict with the world, for the goal of the promised future stabs inexorably into the flesh of every unfulfilled present.’”

⁵⁷ See section 1.5 *The Research Methodology*.

impact on and in our very present, to the very extent of the lives of those who do not even believe themselves but are influenced by us – all because of God's promise which enables the believer to make sense of the present, live in solidarity, and look beyond it to the future.

From the above it is clear that Apocalyptic revelation is practically relevant as it offers hope and helps to make sense of life. It motivates spirituality, provides inspiration to ethical living, and displays an interdependency between eschatology and our present lives. Based on this, an analysis is developed for measuring the practical relevance hermeneutic within apocalyptic interpretation.

A Practical Relevance Analysis is proposed for measuring the practical relevance hermeneutic within apocalyptic interpretation as follows: *Does this interpretation offer hope in one's situation, help one make sense of life and impart motivation to spirituality? Does this interpretation provide inspiration to ethical living and furnish eschatological relevance?*

These will be applied in the practical relevance analysis of preterism, futurism and historicism in the next three chapters.

2.3 Conclusion

In summary, it has been established in this chapter that the five sound apocalyptic hermeneutical principles critical for properly interpreting the Apocalypse are: a Christological principle, an apocalyptic principle, a prophetic-image principle, an exegetical principle and a practical relevance principle.

A lack of decent hermeneutics in which to interpret apocalyptic prophecy leads "at best to a failure to gain the full meaning and inspiration the book provides, and at worst to gross misunderstandings of the book and its message" (Strand, 1979:9). As noted in the introductory chapter, much of the populist notions regarding apocalypticism within the Church is due to certain apocalyptic interpretation schools being more prominent than others. The increased popularity of some of these notions over the last 50 years has raised concern in certain theological circles. Strand (1979:9) makes the valid point that

recent studies on the Revelation indicate “a growing emphasis on proper hermeneutics.” For this reason, these apocalyptic interpretation schools will be critically evaluated throughout the next chapters.

The analysis model for this study, which was proposed in this chapter, is based on hermeneutical principles. This model will be utilised in the critical evaluation of the main apocalyptic interpretation schools. Chapter 3 will present a critical analysis of preterism.

CHAPTER 3: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF PRETERISM

This chapter explores preterism, one of the main apocalyptic interpretation schools, to evaluate its validity in terms of the five-tier analysis model introduced in Chapter 2. The chapter commences by defining preterism in more detail. Subsequently, the key preterist teachings are mapped, followed by a detailed analysis of this interpretation school.

3.1 PRETERISM DEFINED

The interpretation schools within our scope of research were briefly introduced in Chapter 1 for overview purposes. However, scholars and adherents to these models will not all agree with those brief definitions. Moreover, such brief definitions are insufficient for the purpose of this study. Therefore, the preterist apocalyptic approach needs to be more clearly and extensively elucidated as I endeavour to answer the following question: *What is the theological reasoning behind preterism and what will be the outcome of a critical analysis of this hermeneutic?*

3.1.1 Introduction

As an introduction to his readers, Welton (2017) describes the Apocalypse as a work of art and the schools of interpretation as different approaches to art. He equates the Book of Revelation to a large old painting with different art experts standing in front of it. Each of these experts answers the same questions about this piece of art differently, illustrating that “each of these methods of interpretation answers the basic four questions – *when, how, why and where* – very differently” (Welton, 2017:12). Welton depicts these art experts as eager to answer the questions and paints his own image of how they respond in order to show their viewpoints. However, as this illustration unfolds over the next three pages, it becomes obvious from the way the author phrases the answers that he will not fairly evaluate these interpretation schools. Clearly, he lets the illustration be a playoff with the preterist ‘artist’ being the only one giving the ‘logical’ answers. Without any substantiation, the other methods of interpretation are poised against preterism to be illogical, with the whole book leading the reader only to understand the Book of Revelation from the preterist viewpoint.

The problem does not lie in theologians teaching their viewpoints, but in sweeping statements when referring to the other schools of interpretation, dismissing them on no proper or fair grounds. Absolutely, Revelation can be depicted as an artwork and the methods of interpretation likened to different art experts. However, these ‘experts’ cannot simply be dismissed by different people’s logic or liking. Therefore, the vital contribution of this study is the fair⁵⁷ evaluation of the different schools of apocalyptic interpretation.

3.1.2 Broad definition

According to Stevanovic (2018:2), the term ‘preterism’ comes from Latin, with *preter* meaning ‘past’. Alternatively, Wolhberg (2004:115) indicates that the prefix ‘pre’ may point to the past. Gentry (2010:21) argues that preterism is based on the Latin word *Praeteritus*, which means ‘gone by.’ Preterism can therefore be defined as “a method of interpretation that places the significance of Revelation in the past” (Stevanovic, 2018:2). It is a hermeneutical school of thought which views apocalyptic prophecies as fulfilled close to and around the day of the original writer. In agreement, Ottman (1967:vii) holds that preterists believe that nearly everything in the Book of Revelation⁵⁸ that claims to be prediction has already been fulfilled. Gentry (2010:21) asserts that, according to the preterist approach, Revelation teaches that John was prophesying about “events future to his own day, but which are now in our past.” In addition, Gulley (2016:21) explains preterism as “all interpretation back in history”, while De Kock (2013:87) specifies it as a view according to which “some or all of the biblical prophecies concerning the Last Days (or End Times)” refer to events that actually occurred “in the first century after Christ’s birth, or not much later.” Therefore Gregg (2013:13) concludes that preterism is an approach that “views the fulfillment of Revelation’s prophecies as having occurred already, in what is now the ancient past.” Macdonald (2016:2456) specifies preterism as

⁵⁷ See section 1.5 *The Research Methodology*.

⁵⁸ Throughout this research when I refer to apocalyptic prophecy, I include the Book of Daniel as well as the apocalyptic predictions of Christ in Matthew 24 and Luke 21. Although some theologians mainly refer to the book Revelation when discussing apocalyptic prophecy, most theological scholars would agree that the Book of Daniel as well as the apocalyptic predictions of Christ in Matthew 24 and Luke 21 are part of biblical apocalyptic literature. Bauckham (1988, as cited in Ferguson, 1988:34) categorise the Book of Daniel with that of Revelation as “Historical-Eschatological apocalypses”.

an approach claiming that all the events of Revelation had been fulfilled during the period of the Roman Empire.⁵⁹ This will also include the prophetic events of Matthew 24 and Luke 21 (Wolhberg, 2004:115).

Moltmann (1996:227) calls Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 the “little synoptic apocalypses” to indicate that these passages should also be considered when dealing with apocalyptic. It is therefore critical in our definition of preterism to include all biblical apocalyptic prophecy to grasp that preterism not only interprets the Book of Revelation, as noted more thoroughly in the footnotes above. Rogers (2017:17), for instance, maintains that the preterist interpretation is the best explanation of Daniel. Many theologians⁶⁰ who ascribe to preterism include the Book of Daniel into this paradigm. In agreement with Wohlberg and De Kock regarding the time element,⁶¹ Rogers (2017:17) argues that the events described in Daniel had been fulfilled “before or during the generation who lived at the time of Jesus Christ.” Yet, not all preterist theologians will agree with this statement as some place certain events in the Book of Daniel in a much earlier period.⁶² Nevertheless, in the broader definition of preterism, it is evident that this interpretational position imputes apocalyptic prophecy to the times of the apocalypse writer.

Morris (1984:16) summarises the apocalyptic preterist interpretation, stating that these prophecies are based on the situation of the first Christians in the first century when the Roman Empire dominated the scene. Since it was focused on the church of the day, it was meaningful to the people it was written for. This understanding of preterism is

⁵⁹ According to Hays (2007:376), preterism suggests that “John uses figurative language to communicate to first-century readers how God plans to intervene to deliver them from the evils of the Roman Empire”.

⁶⁰ Rogers (2017:15) confirms James Jordan as a preterist who also wrote an extensive 733-page preterist commentary on the Book of Daniel: Jordan, JB 2007, *The Handwriting on the Wall: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, Amazon.com, viewed 15 February 2020, <https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/091581563X/ref=dbs_a_def_rwt_bibl_vppi_i5>

⁶¹ Whereas Roger expounds on the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel, Wohlberg and De Kock do so on the Book of Revelation.

⁶² It depends to what stream of preterism you adhere to. Some preterists interpret the Antichrist to be Antiochus Epiphanes IV around the year 168 BC. Others “limit the fulfillment of its prophecies to the time period that runs from the time of Daniel in the sixth century B.C. to the first coming of Christ” (Pfandl, 2010:80).

supported by Michaels (1997:22), Patterson (2012: 27), Hays (2007:376) and Mathews (2012:85), among others.

Figure 3.1 below provides a schematic presentation of preterism in the context of a timeline.⁶³ The three elements crucial to any prophecy are the author's day, history, and the future. The figure highlights in red where on the timeline, in terms of these elements, preterism places the fulfillment of the prophecy.

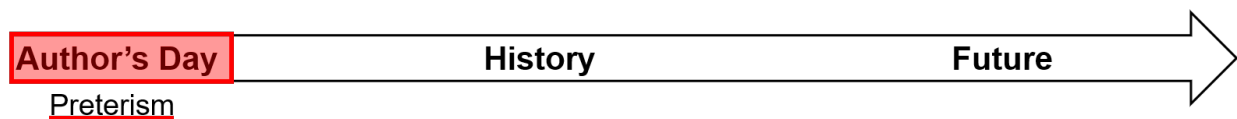


Figure 3.1 Schematic illustration of preterism

Figure 3.1 clearly illustrates the aim of preterism as the relevancy of the text to the original audience around the author's day.

Preterism argues a scriptural position, believing that the Apocalypse itself infers that its prophecies will soon be fulfilled, indicating the time around the author's day. The reason, as will be discussed later in this chapter, is that the Apocalypse pronounces the 'quick' fulfillment as 'the time is near'. Thus, according to this argument, the fulfillment of the prophecies could not be throughout history as historicism interprets, or in the far future, as futurism states. Rather, it should be understood preteristically, namely that they had been fulfilled close to the author's day.

⁶³ Fiddes (2000:181–218) affirms that historical time can better be illustrated and understood in a horizontal way than with a cyclical illustration where everything is repeated. He describes it as the arrow of time "forward moving". Fiddes (2000:181–218) validates that the inherent and cultural cyclical rhythms, "The Jewish and Christian traditions of faith have, in principle, advocated a linear view of history, with the arrow of time flying from first creation to new creation rather than looping back..."

Travis (1988, as cited in Ferguson, 1988:228) expound further on this thought as follows, "In contrast with cyclical views of history, which hold that the universe is locked into a cycle of endless repetition, special divine revelation led the Hebrews to see history as moving towards a future goal."

3.1.3 Full preterism (or) historical critical preterism⁶⁴

The prophetic interpretation school of full preterism argues for a fulfilled eschatology where all apocalyptic prophecies have been fulfilled in the past, around AD 70. To be more technically correct, this interpretation holds the view that predictive prophecy is unscientific and “views Revelation not as future, predictive prophecy, but as a historical record of events in the first century Roman Empire” (MacArthur, 1999:9). Morris (1984:17) claims that some form of this view is adopted by most modern scholars. As it was not part of my focus, I have not determined whether most modern scholars adhere to this branch of preterism. Still, in my search through hundreds of sources, manuscripts and journals, it became evident that many modern liberal scholars subscribe to this branch of preterism with its historical-critical and idealistic approach and ideology as it fits their paradigm. As Michaels (1997:22) maintains, modern historical critical scholarship has assumed that the Book of Revelation is indeed about the author’s social world. Instead of being viewed as predictive prophecy, the Apocalypse is reduced to a mere “historical record” (MacArthur, 1999:9) in highly symbolic fashion with indepth interpretations to cast all prophecies into the mortar of the past with no eschatological hope to look forward to.

According to De Kock (2013:88), full preterism holds that Jesus’ Second Coming is a ‘return’ manifested by the physical destruction of Jerusalem and her temple in AD 70, similar to various Old Testament descriptions which portray God coming to destroy other nations in righteous judgment. While partial preterists support this interpretation, they fail to agree that Jerusalem’s destruction was the climax of all apocalyptic prophecies and end time events. Moreover, they do not support full preterists’ disregard for the orthodox

⁶⁴ Some theologians like Hitchcock (2006) and Gregg (1997) suggest that there are three basic types of preterism. The one they add that I am not including is that of Literary-Critical Preterism. The reason why I am not considering it is that I propose that it falls under full preterism as it has all the same elements. What does set them apart is that they believe the Apocalypse to be written “in Domitian’s reign (i.e., A.D. 95–96)” (Gregg, 1997:37).

Christian eschatological beliefs⁶⁵ like the final consummation with the Resurrection, Final Judgment and the New Heavens and the New Earth.⁶⁶

Partial preterism is extremely critical of this branch of preterism and labels it hyper-preterism⁶⁷ or radical preterism as Sproul (2015:295) calls it, for it “sees all future prophecies of the New Testament as having already taken place.” Yet, owing to the fact that partial preterists’ hermeneutic is not consistent, interpreting most apocalyptic prophecies to refer to the past and a few to the future,⁶⁸ full preterism sees itself as the only consistent preterism. However, for futurists, who view prophecy not only as literal but as predictive, this type of preterism is objectionable. Hitchcock (2012:39) calls this branch of preterism “extreme preterism” as it maintains that all prophecies are past events. He highlights that full preterists profess that if there is an end to history, it is not recorded in the Bible. Thus, to explain eschatological events like the Resurrection and New Heaven

⁶⁵ Samuel M. Frost (2002) wrote the book *Misplaced Hope* where he confirms and explains his full preterist ideas and refutes belief in the basic orthodox Christian eschatological beliefs like the Resurrection, Judgment and New Heavens and Earth. He later changed his views and in 2012 wrote the book *Why I Left Full Preterism*. He is now a partial preterist.

⁶⁶ De Kock (2013:88) explains that full preterism denies these future eschatological happenings, teaching the following: “The Resurrection of the dead did not entail the raising of the physical body, but rather the resurrection of the soul from the ‘place of the dead’, known as Sheol (Hebrew) or Hades (Greek). As such, the righteous dead obtained a spiritual and substantial body for use in the heavenly realm, and the unrighteous dead were cast into the Lake of Fire. Some Full Preterists believe this judgment is ongoing and takes effect upon the death of each individual (Heb. 9:27). The New Heavens and the New Earth are also equated with the New Covenant and the fulfillment of the Law in A.D. 70 and are to be viewed in the same manner by which a Christian is considered a ‘new creation’ upon his or her conversion.”

⁶⁷ A term used by Kenneth L. Gentry in his criticism of full preterism: Gentry, KL 1997, *A Brief Theological Analysis of Hyper-Preterism*, Reformed.org, viewed 27 February 2020, <<https://reformed.org/eschatology/a-brief-theological-analysis-of-hyper-preterism-by-kenneth-l-gentry-jr/>>

⁶⁸ There are many arguments and discussions in this regard. Sproul (2015: loc 2315) refers to one of these, “Full preterists, on the other hand, argue that this approach is inconsistent and arbitrary, resulting in multiple comings of Christ and days of the Lord. They insist that time-frame references in the Olivet Discourse supply the supreme key to New Testament prophecy and that this key applies to all references to eschatological events.”

Further, Sproul (2015: loc 2307) relates the bigger overview of full preterism’s argument, “Full preterists refer to themselves as ‘consistent’ preterists, implying that partial preterists are ‘inconsistent’. Full preterists apply a strict view of the meaning of *parousia*, end of the age, and the day of the Lord.” Their argument then means that they consistently view the *parousia* as the same event throughout scripture as with *the end of the age* and *the day of the Lord*, whereas partial preterists do not. In contrast, they “acknowledge that in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 there was a *parousia* or coming of Christ,” ... “but they maintain that it was not *the parousia*” (Sproul, 2015: loc 2307).

and New Earth, they must utilise idealistic allegorical models (Hitchcock, 2012:39). Hitchcock (2012:39) further explains that “they view the Resurrection as spiritual. According to this view we are beyond the Millennium and are presently in the new heaven and new earth.” This is why many preterist evangelical theologians consider full preterism not to be part of Christian orthodoxy as it is not affirming the basic Christian creeds. Futurists such as Hitchcock (2012:39) fully support this, stating that “by rejecting clear biblical truths such as the second coming of Christ, the bodily resurrection, and the final judgment, full preterists stand outside the pale of orthodoxy.” In an article,⁶⁹ ‘A Brief Theological Analysis of Hyper-Preterism,’ partial preterist Gentry argues to the same effect.⁷⁰

De Kock (2013:88) concludes that this view only leaves one “with vague, allegedly ‘symbolic’ formulations, a crop of sometimes dramatic incidents, and diverting tales.” Seeing that it does not adhere to the divine predictive element and nature of prophecy,⁷¹ I will not research this branch of preterism when analysing and evaluating preterism.

3.1.4 Partial preterism (or) moderate preterism

Partial preterism is an apocalyptic hermeneutical approach that has a growing number of proponents, mostly within the reformed tradition and, to a lesser extent, within the evangelical community.⁷² Whelton (2017:16) indicates this to be the largest contingent of preterists. Hitchcock (2012:39) expounds that, according to partial preterists, the

⁶⁹ Gentry, KL 1997, *A Brief Theological Analysis of Hyper-Preterism*, Reformed.org, viewed 27 February 2020, <<https://reformed.org/eschatology/a-brief-theological-analysis-of-hyper-preterism-by-kenneth-l-gentry-jr/>>

⁷⁰ Gentry divulges the following about full preterism: “It is outside the creedal orthodoxy of Christianity. No creed allows any second Advent in A. D. 70. No creed allows any other type of resurrection than a bodily one. Historic creeds speak of the universal, personal judgment of all men, not of a representative judgment in A. D. 70. It would be most remarkable if the entire church that came through A. D. 70 missed the proper understanding of the eschaton and did not realize its members had been resurrected!”

⁷¹ Unlike the adherents of full preterism, most adherents of partial preterism believe in the predictive nature of prophecy, therefore Sproul (2014:5) states, “These things came to pass in perfect detail; as foretold by Jesus, the temple was destroyed in AD 70 and the Jews were dispersed throughout the world. This prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple provides firm proof of the identity of Jesus and the inspiration of Scripture by the Holy Spirit, and it should close the mouth of even the most hardened skeptic.”

⁷² In my research I found that futurism has the most adherents within the evangelical community.

destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 had fulfilled most of Revelation's visions. In the same vein, Sproul (2015: loc 3512, 3520) describes this approach as "an eschatological viewpoint that places many ... eschatological events in the past, especially during the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70." Although the Second Coming, the Resurrection, and the Final Judgment are not part of this eschatological view,⁷³ as these preterists believe that many future prophecies in the New Testament have already been fulfilled, they do believe that certain crucial prophecies have not yet been fulfilled (Sproul, 2015:294). Whelton (2017:16) distinctly explains, "[T]hey hold that most prophecy in the New Testament has been fulfilled, but that Jesus will have a final return in our future."

The schematic illustration of preterism in Figure 3.1 above can be slightly altered to present a more technically correct illustration of partial preterism as in Figure 3.2 below.

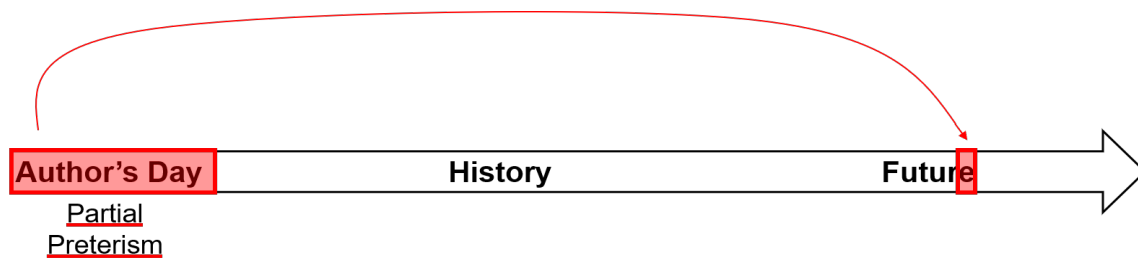


Figure 3.2 Schematic illustration of partial preterism

From Figure 3.2 it is evident that even partial preterism is almost entirely focused on the past, with a huge leap into the far, unknown future where the critical events of eschatology will take place.

⁷³ My finding with this research was that many historicists and futurists when defining, referring to or describing preterism either leave out partial preterism, ignore it, or are ignorant of its existence. When they describe preterism in their literature, they only describe full preterism. As an example, I will quote the full explanation of preterism that historicist Stevanovic (2018:2) presented in a paper, "Preterism (from Latin *preter* meaning 'past') is a method of interpretation that places the significance of Revelation in the past. From the preterist perspective, the book deals exclusively with the Christian church in the Roman province of Asia in the first century A.D., during which time it faced impending persecution by imperial Rome. In this view, Revelation does not contain predictive prophecies. Therefore, John the revelator only wrote about events that took place in his time or in the immediate future. According to this approach, the purpose of the book was to encourage the Christians of John's day to persevere in their faithfulness to God."

As mentioned, partial preterism places almost all eschatological events described in the Apocalypse and elsewhere in Scripture in the distant past that leads up to Jesus' coming. De Kock (2013:87) notes that, according to partial preterism, "prophecies such as the destruction of Jerusalem, the Antichrist, the Great Tribulation, and the advent of the Day of the Lord as a 'judgment-coming' (Last Judgment) of Christ were fulfilled circa A.D. 70."

To partial preterists, this was not just any event as it was of great significance when "the Roman general (and future Emperor) Titus sacked Jerusalem and destroyed the Jewish Temple, putting a permanent stop to the daily animal sacrifices" (De Kock, 2013:87). This, to partial preterism, indicates a shift in history as eschatological events took place where the end came to God's people and ushered in a new day to God's new covenant people.

De Kock (2013:87) carefully clarifies that "most Partial Preterists believe the term Last Days refers not to the last days of planet Earth or the last days of humankind, but rather to the last days of the Mosaic covenant which God had exclusively with national Israel until the year A.D. 70."

Many apocalyptic events are interpreted within this context to give weight to this view. Even the judgments depicted within the Apocalypse and the Antichrist power are located back to the distant past. It even "identifies 'Babylon the great' (Revelation 17–18) with the ancient pagan City of Rome or Jerusalem" (De Kock, 2013:87).

3.2 MAPPING PRETERIST TEACHING

Preterism comes in many forms, brands and branches⁷⁴. Table 3.1 below presents a few that this research identified.

Table 3.1 Various forms of preterism

Preterist Premillennialism	Preterist Postmillennialism	Preterist Amillennialism
(Coming of Christ before Millennium)	(Coming of Christ after Millennium)	(Millennium is spiritual)
Preterism by James Stuart Russell	Partial preterism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dominion (Kingdom Now) theology • Reconstructionism • Replacement theology 	A form of partial preterism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classical preterism • Extreme preterism

A concise summary of the partial preterist teachings, specifically those of postmillennial partial preterists, is presented below. Please note that, while much more detail exists, only the main teachings are referred to here.

- Dating of Revelation
- Time indicators
- The End
- Two second comings
- Apocalypse fulfilled in the 1st century
- Eschatology
- Victorious Eschatology

These key teachings will now be discussed in more detail.

⁷⁴ Pfandl (2003, as cited in Du Preez, 2003:383) identifies preterism also among SDA scholars and terms it "Adventist Preterism."

3.2.1 Dating of Revelation

To preterism, the dating of Revelation is critical. Preterists argue for an earlier date of authorship, for instance AD 64–68. Anderberg (2017:21) confirms this position, stating that preterists firmly believe that Revelation was written prior to the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, in about AD 66–68.⁷⁵ He points out, though, that preterists refer only to the internal evidence of the book, with no external proof. Historicists and futurists, on the other hand, argue for a later date, around AD 90–96, with most scholars throughout church history having dated Revelation to be written in AD 95/96 during the reign of Domitian Caesar (Anderberg, 2017:21). The earlier date is crucial for the preterist position due to the belief that the greater portion of all biblical apocalyptic prophecy finds its fulfillment in the destruction of Jerusalem, historically dated AD 70. Anderberg (2017:21) concludes that reasonable evidence pointing to the later date (after AD 70) therefore destroys the very foundations of preterism.

As a preterist himself, Newton (2012:251) acknowledges that a date of authorship before the fall of Jerusalem must be reasonably affirmed for a preterist interpretation to be considered. He agrees that if a date before August AD 70 is not reasonable, the preterist interpretation must be abolished (Newton, 2012:251–252) and proceeds to present three arguments for this earlier dating of authorship of Revelation (Newton, 2012:252–256). Yet, these arguments are ironically subjective, employing the very preterist approach it is trying to establish.

If the book was written later, the references used in these arguments were only reflections on history and not predictive prophecy. Technically, this should not be a problem to full preterists as they do not adhere to any predictive element within apocalyptic prophecy,

⁷⁵ Hitchcock (2006:468) states, “Contemporary preterists have painted themselves into a narrow corner for the date of Revelation. According to Gentry, Revelation anticipated the destruction of Jerusalem (August, A.D. 70), the death of Nero (June, A.D. 68), and the formal imperial engagement of the Jewish War (spring, A.D. 67). He also maintains that the book was written after the initial outbreak of the Tribulation, which he believes began with the Neronian persecution in November, A.D. 64. Therefore for Gentry and other preterists the terminus a quo for Revelation is the beginning of the Neronian persecution in November, A.D. 64, and the terminus ad quem is spring, A.D. 67. If Revelation is a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem (in August, 70) and the forty-two month Tribulation that preceded it, then it had to be written no later than the spring of A.D. 67. The preterist interpretation therefore depends on a pre-spring 67 date of composition, not just a pre-70 date, as is often implied.”

viewing Revelation merely as a historical record of events in the first century Roman Empire (MacArthur, 1999:9). Whereas the dating of Revelation is quite critical to preterists, even to many full preterists, due to their doctrinal foundation resting on the theory that the Book of Revelation was written prior to the fall of Jerusalem (Anderberg, 2017:22), it does not matter to historicists and futurists. In Gentry's monumental book on the early dating of Revelation, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, he leans toward a date after the outbreak of the Neronian persecution in late AD 64 and before the declaration of the Jewish War in early AD 67, finding a date in either AD 65 or early AD 66 most probable (Gentry, 1989:336). Although he admits that among current Christian scholarship, whether liberal or conservative, the most common view is that of a Domitianic date for the book around AD 95 (Gentry, 1989:333), he needs to maintain an early date as to give credence to preterism. Therefore, he states, "I remain as firmly convinced of the early date and the preterist approach to Revelation as ever" (Gentry, 1989:xvii). Yet, Miller (1991:12), a historicist, proves from history that the Book of Revelation was written about 96 AD.⁷⁶

Hitchcock (2006:469) underscores that "[t]he entire preterist system therefore rises or falls on the early date of Revelation." Interpretation so dependent and focused on the dating of Revelation needs to be questioned.

3.2.2 Time indicators

Preterism argues a scriptural position in that the Apocalypse itself infers that its prophecies will "quickly" be fulfilled as "the time is near", thus around the author's day. For instance, Gentry (2010:34), a partial preterist, comments that John's book commences with the emphatic declaration in verses 1 and 3 that the events expected in Revelation "must shortly take place" (Rev. 1:1) because "the time is near" (Rev. 1:3). He argues that John not only declares the events of his book near, but through his nearness declarations also relates the purpose of his writing, applying that purpose to his first century audience (Gentry, 2010:34). Gentry therefore applies the nearness wording to

⁷⁶ Miller (1991:12) states the following regarding preterism: "Any scheme of interpretation that does not see the book as predicting things that are future from the time of Emperor Domitian is not in harmony with the internal intention of the writer of Revelation and should on that account be discarded."

John's immediate audience only in its literal fulfillment⁷⁷ and further debates the point that Revelation 1:1 advises the original audience that John is writing about "the things which must shortly take place" (Gentry, 2010:34). He argues that if John is writing about "the things which must shortly take place", one would expect this to be his very theme.⁷⁸

This reasoning confirms that preterism is founded on and revolves around timing. In Gentry's (2010:91) own words, "The primary key to understanding Revelation is John's own opening declarations regarding when the events will occur."⁷⁹ Kik (1971:30,142) again argues that Christ in other biblical passages (like Matthew 24:34) indicated that he was coming before the contemporary generation would pass away.⁸⁰

This scriptural basis to the reasoning of partial preterism forms part of the scriptural time indicators that preterists build much of their foundation on. To preterism, this is vital for the interpretation of apocalyptic prophecy that clearly points forward to the future around the author's day. The question remains whether preterism can still be of any value without this 'time element'. As a preterist, DeMar (1999:379) admits that "[w]ithout precision of meaning for the time texts, prophetic pronouncements are meaningless." Clearly, if these 'time elements' were found not to be of such meaning, the implication for partial preterism would be momentous. When one theologically reflects on the impact of such interpretation, this is quite radical. If the prophecies of the Book of Revelation are bound to and by the preterist principle of "locking prophetic interpretation within Bible times"

⁷⁷ Preterist Sproul (2015:294) argues, "[T]he New Testament's time-frame references with respect to the parousia point to a fulfillment within the lifetime of at least some of Jesus's disciples."

⁷⁸ In this regard, Gentry (2010:34) uses common sense reasoning to argue as follows: "It would be strikingly odd if John were to declare temporal nearness for the very purpose of his writing, then give a theme which reached thousands of years beyond his day. After all, does he not declare the nearness of 'the time' as reason why his first century readers must read, hear, and 'heed the things which are written in it' (Rev. 1:3)? Why would he urge them to heed the things written if his thematic purpose lies untold centuries in the future?"

⁷⁹ Du Preez (2006:3-17) contests such interpretation in his exegetical study of these words and terms in the original Greek, and finds that the adverb *ταχύ* (*tachu*) primarily means "quickly, at a rapid rate," thus denoting manner" as opposed to the timing of the Second Coming.

⁸⁰ Davidson (2003, as cited in Du Preez, 2003:307-328) researches this verse and finds in his essay that while contextually this applied to the time of Christ, the structure shows it to "foreshadow the preceding signs and the end of the age."

(Mathews, 2012:107), it means that outside this scope there is no place for other or further development or fulfillment of said apocalyptic prophecies.

3.2.3 The end

In partial preterism, the ‘Last Days’ or the ‘End’ refers to the Jewish age or Mosaic covenant that came to an end, with the *parousia* in AD 70 being a coming of judgment. However, preterists do not believe it to be the final coming of Christ (Sproul, 2015: loc 2307).⁸¹

These two comings of Christ will be discussed in section 3.2.4. For the moment, please note that the *parousia* that took place in AD 70, according to partial preterism, is indicative that the ‘end of the Jewish age’ has dawned and that Israel was replaced by the Church as God’s nation. The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 was predominantly a shift from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant (Whelton, 2017:16). DeMar (1999:87) concurs that the ‘ends of the ages’ refers to the end of the Old Covenant which had come upon the first-century church. He further depicts that the “New Testament describes the nearness of the Lord’s coming and the ‘end of all things’, that is, the end of the distinctly Jewish era with the shadows of the Old Covenant.” He explains that these were end events as they were ‘near’ for those Christians who read the Book of Revelation (Rev. 1:3) (DeMar, 1999:87). DeMar (1999:87) then goes so far as to explicitly state that “[t]here is no other explanation except that time was running out for the shadows of the Old Covenant.”

No more would the Jews be God’s people since “Israel has been rejected as the favored people of God” (Gentry, 2010:143), with the result that “Christ in AD 70 was a coming in judgment on the Jewish nation” (Sproul, 2015: loc 2307). Now “[t]he true church is true

⁸¹ Sproul (2015: loc 2307) states the following in this regard: “While partial preterists acknowledge that in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 there was a *parousia* or coming of Christ, they maintain that it was not *the* *parousia*. That is, the coming of Christ in AD 70 was a coming in judgment on the Jewish nation, indicating the end of the Jewish age and the fulfillment of a day of the Lord. Jesus really did come in judgment at this time, fulfilling his prophecy in the Olivet Discourse. But this was not the final or ultimate coming of Christ.”

Israel, and true Israel is truly the church” (Hanegraaff, 2007:49). This replacement theology is highly criticised by dispensationalists.

3.2.4 Two second comings

With numerous passages referring to it and the events surrounding it, the *parousia* has been interpreted as the second coming of Christ by most theological commentators through many generations. And yet, many of the biblical passages dealing with this *parousia* or coming of Christ are interpreted by partial preterists to indicate that it has already occurred in AD 70. In contrast with futurism’s view that the kingdom will not come until the *parousia*, partial preterists maintain that “the kingdom is a present reality” which translates that the *parousia* had already occurred (Sproul, 2015:288). The challenge with the preterist view of the events of the last days occurring in AD 70 and the coming of Christ as judgment on the Jews and Jerusalem is that it is “a rather limited judgment of the world, focused on Jerusalem, as opposed to the view of Daniel 2 and 7; [Revelation] 22:12, which anticipates a universal judgment” (Mathews, 2012:87).

As briefly mentioned in the previous section, partial preterism does foresee an eschatological *parousia* or coming of Christ in the unknown future. While Sproul (2015: loc 2307), a partial preterist, maintains that the coming in judgment was not the final coming (see footnote 80), De Kock (2013:87) explains that according to preterism that the final coming in the future will entail the Second Coming of Christ, the physical resurrection of the dead from the grave, the final judgment, and the creation of a literal New Heavens and a New Earth.

However, certain challenges emerge with the expectation of an ‘ultimate coming’ of Christ. Firstly, many of the prophecies that refer to the *parousia* or coming of Christ are being interpreted as already fulfilled, which creates a divide of a technical and careful dichotomy between *a parousia* and *the parousia* that is not substantiated within Scripture.

Secondly, the literal, personal coming of Christ again to this world after apocalyptic events, as described and predicted by Christ Himself, is being diminished to a spiritual coming in AD 70. Sproul (2015: loc 2307) asserts, concerning Jerusalem’s destruction in AD 70, that “Jesus really did come.” In addition, Kik, in his book *An Eschatology of Victory*,

ascribes almost all apocalyptic prophecy to the time of the first century, as partial preterists do, and emphasises that the second coming refers to Christ's coming in judgment against his enemies.⁸² Yet, only two chapters later, Christ prophesied to the high priest, "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Matthew 26:64), which surely evinces a literal future coming of Christ. However, Kik (1971:142) does not believe that it refers to Christ's second coming but rather indicates that "after the crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus would ascend into heaven and take his place on the right hand of God, the Father."

The question remains how the high priest would see Christ coming in the clouds, especially in the light of what the Apocalypse says in the first chapter, "Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen." (Revelation 1:7) If this is not denoting the end in future, when did the tribes of the earth mourn in this coming of Christ in AD 70? Kik (1971:143) postulates that "the sign of the reigning Christ was seen in the destruction of Jerusalem" and that the tribes of the earth mourned this destruction.

Preterism seems inconsistent. In addition to spiritualising texts and scripture that have been literally understood for millennia, it takes the scriptural passages that describe Christ's *parousia* in marked similar fashion as clearly one event and create two events out of it, separated by thousands of years. There is no scriptural basis for such a division, not even if the one is a so-called spiritual coming. In contrast with such notion, Hebrews 9:27–28 declares:

⁸² After quoting Matthew 24:30 where Christ declares that he will return "in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory," Kik (1971:140, 141) states, "This clause has been thought to relate definitely to the second, visible, and personal coming of the Lord. But in the light of well-defined biblical language, the reference is rather to a coming in terms of the events of his providence in judgment against his enemies and in deliverance of his people." In commenting about the apocalyptic nature of this passage, Sproul (2015:578) honestly admits that this passage poses great difficulty to the narrative and paradigm of partial preterists to interpret this in the far past, while the text itself contradicts its very interpretation, "This passage describes the *parousia* in vivid and graphic images of astronomical perturbations. It speaks of signs in the sky that will be visible and the sound of a trumpet that will be audible. Perhaps no portion of the Olivet Discourse provides more difficulties to the preterist view than this one."

And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.

This verse is one of the most distinct verses in all of Scripture where it is explicitly pronounced that, as there was one coming by Christ to this earth to die on the cross, so there will be one more coming *a second time*.

3.2.5 Apocalypse fulfilled in 1st century

Michaels (1997:22), probing the preterist interpretation of Revelation, asks, “[W]hat then is the book of Revelation about?” He then explains, “[I]t is indeed about the author’s social world.” Patterson (2012: 27) argues that it is in the context of this social world that preterists see Revelation as “an assessment of circumstances and the perceived threat of persecution in the era in which John lived and composed the Apocalypse.” In light of this view, the Apocalypse is “primarily applicable to the situation in the Christian Church in the Roman province of Asia in the first century A.D.” (Mathews, 2012:85).

Preteristically understood, the prophecies could not be fulfilled throughout history as historicism interprets, or in the far future as futurism states, but had been fulfilled close to the author’s day. Since, according to the preterist approach, the prophecies had been directed to the situation in which John lived, they should be understood “the way the original audience in the seven churches of Asia Minor would have understood it” (Hays, 2007:376).

The preterist perspective on the prophecies having been fulfilled in the first century is based on the following convictions:

- The Great Tribulation took place in AD 70 with Jerusalem’s destruction.
- Israel as a people of God corporately came to an end, and the Church is now spiritual Israel.
- The Beast was Nero/Rome in the first century.
- Babylon the Harlot is Jerusalem that was destroyed in AD 70 in judgment on the people that rejected the Messiah.

These preterist convictions are discussed in more detail below.

Preterism proposes that *the great tribulation* was also fulfilled in AD 70 with Jerusalem's destruction. The more you delve into the preterist explanation of apocalyptic prophecy, the more you discover that almost every prophecy is believed to have been fulfilled in this one event in AD 70. This is substantiated by Meek (2016:85) who presents that "[t]here are over one hundred time frame references and implications in the Bible that support the idea that the last days and the Second Coming were to be in the first century." Meek (2016:80) therefore concurs that "the Great Judgment, of which the New Testament speaks repeatedly, came to pass in AD 70, just as it had been prophesied!" He then unsurprisingly concludes that the "tribulation and judgment are inexorably linked to each other and to the first century" (Meek, 2016:80).

In the same vein, DeMar (1999:117–127) dedicates a whole chapter, titled 'The Past Great Tribulation', to establishing that the great tribulation was the judgment Jerusalem faced in AD 70. He clearly teaches an escape from the great tribulation when he argues that when Jerusalem was surrounded by armies (Luke 21:20), it was a sign to "the elect" (the Jewish Christians) to leave the city so that they would escape its destruction in AD 70. Yet, in the same chapter, he takes issue with futurists who claim that the believers will escape the tribulation when he says, "What we will not have is a rapture that will remove us where tribulation is a reality," and asserts that "[e]ntry into the kingdom comes through 'much tribulation' (Acts 14:22)" (DeMar, 1999:124).⁸³ Still, he claims that Matthew 24 predicted this very thing, just in the 1st century? Does this not reveal prejudice, condemning futurism for the exact teaching, just removed to the 1st century?

Furthermore, if the great tribulation had already happened in the distant past, why would the Apocalypse, even in a preterist sense, be sent to the seven churches in Asia Minor, as they had been far removed from Jerusalem and would not have been affected by the tribulation? Revelation 2:10 says,

⁸³ A more balanced view would be that while believers will have to go through tribulation like Daniel through the lion's den and John through banishment on Patmos in apocalyptic literature as types of believers, God will be with believers as he was with Daniel and John.

Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

If preterists argue that this was another tribulation about which the church in Smyrna was warned, what then about the following tribulation reference in Revelation 7:1–3?

After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, “Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.”

A few verses later, in Revelation 7:13–14, it is evident that these winds symbolise the great tribulation through which God wants to take his servants safely.

Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, “Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?” And I said to him, “Sir, you know.” So he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

Note that these saved ones have gone through the tribulation. This, together with the fact that the Apocalypse that warns about the great tribulation was not sent to the believers in Jerusalem but to the seven churches in Asia minor, clearly indicates that Jerusalem’s destruction in 70 AD could not have been the great tribulation.

I have already referred to the preterist doctrine of *Israel as a people of God that corporately came to an end* in section 3.2.3. I will therefore just add DeMar’s (1999:398) conclusion to this subject. The author argues that there is no scriptural support for any prophetic significance in Israel’s restoration as a nation.

He condemns the futurist approach which, in the absence of any direct reference to a rebuilt temple, restored nationhood, or reestablishment of the land in the New Testament, insists that the fig tree illustration in Matthew 24:32 compensates for this silence. DeMar (1999:399) maintains that “a study of all the New Testament texts that compare Israel to a fig tree points to Jerusalem’s destruction not its restoration.”

When it comes to the identity of *the Beast*, futurists cannot identify it as it is still in the future, but preterists can, as it is a past event. As preterist, Gentry (2010:58) identifies the Beast as the Roman empire, specifically Nero Caesar, “its contemporary head”. Preterists therefore lock the Beast power of the Apocalypse in the distant past in similar fashion to their method of locking apocalyptic prophecy in the days of the author.

With Nero identified as the biblical beast, the question remains whether he fits the characteristics provided in the Apocalypse. Gentry (2010:62) believes he does, stating that “Nero happens not only to be the first emperor to persecute the Christian church, but is also the authority who commissioned the Roman general Vespasian to attack and destroy Jerusalem.”

Some preterists may argue that Nero did not destroy Jerusalem eventually; however, in preterist writings it is acknowledged that the next leadership were all part of the Antichrist prophecy. Gentry (2010:71) confirms this by relating how it all fits into prophecy. He reasons that Nero dies by his own sword wound, while the Beast is portrayed as receiving a deadly wound to ‘one of his heads’ and “the Empire revives to the astonishment of the world...” Thus, according to Gentry, Nero fulfilled the prophecy that predicted the Beast to receive a deadly wound but to relive.

Important to note, though, is the repeating inconsistency within preterism. Almost everything in the Apocalypse is symbolically interpreted, which is not incorrect as shown in Chapter 2 where Stefanovic (2019:7) was quoted to state that we need to interpret Revelation symbolically, unless the text points to a literal meaning. Yet, there are instances where preterists interpret literally where no contextual indication exists for doing so. A visible example within the chapter of the Beast is that of the duration of its reign, namely 42 months (Revelation 13:5).

Gentry (1989:254) points out that the express delimitation of the Beast's persecution of the saints is a period of 42 months, while the Neronian persecution lasted just about that same length of time. Note, however, that he uses the phrase 'just about', as the duration of the persecution is questionable.⁸⁴

Gentry does the same with the 42 months found in Revelation 11:2. He interprets it literally with no contextual indication to do so. He is fully aware of this fact as he says, "Under the providence of God the symbolic 'broken seven' became the literal time-frame of Jerusalem's doom" (Gentry, 1989:253). Although the time period this time ends with Jerusalem's destruction, he easily avoids the argument by stating that the symbolic element is a broken seven. However, this is not the question. The question is what textual and contextual evidence exists to interpret it as a literal time frame. There is none. Within this time period, Gentry cannot with definitive certainty show 42 months in history; thus, he states that "it took almost exactly forty-two months for Rome to get into a position to destroy the Temple in the Jewish War of A.D. 67–70" (Gentry, 1989:250). Why does preterism try to interpret a time period that is symbolic as literal? It fits the narrative and gives 'credence' to establish Nero as the apocalyptic Beast.

Gentry (2010:73) provides a preterist perspective on *the apocalyptic harlot* referred to in Revelation 17:3–6. He sees the Great Harlot of Babylon, which he regards to be even more important than the Beast and who is sitting on the Beast, as first-century Jerusalem, the home of the temple of God.

After this introduction to his readers, Gentry uses 18 pages of scriptural references throughout the Old and New Testament to prove that this great harlot represents Jerusalem that was destroyed in judgment in AD 70. However, there is one vital challenge with this interpretation: Gentry (2010:73) admits that this harlot is "sitting on the Beast". To most scholars, this biblical image of 'sitting on' would scripturally mean 'being in control

⁸⁴ Yet, Gentry (1989:254) quotes Moses Stuart as follows to prove this veritable factuality that springs from his literal interpretation of this time period: "The persecution of Nero began about the middle or latter part of Nov. A.D. 64, at Rome. It ended with the death of Nero, which was on the ninth of June, A.D. 68, for on that day Galba entered Rome and was proclaimed emperor. Here again is 3 + years or 1260 days with sufficient exactness; for the precise time of forty-two months expires about the middle or end of May, and Nero died in the first part of June..." (Moses Stuart, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 2 vols. Andover: Allen, Merrill, & Wardwell, 1845. 2:469.

of'. When this is in actuality transposed as Gentry does, it literally means that Jerusalem is sitting on Rome. Hermeneutically and historically, this is not just incorrect but nonsensical. How can Jerusalem be the harlot in control of Rome, when Rome that is identified as the Beast is destroying Jerusalem in AD 70? Unsurprisingly, Gentry gives no explanation to this conundrum. For the record, symbolic construction and order is important in the wider narrative and for guiding the effective interpretation thereof.

3.2.6 Eschatology

The prophecies in the last three chapters of Revelation still await fulfillment. So, preterist eschatology basically consists of these three chapters in the Apocalypse. Technically speaking, it does not even involve the entire three chapters⁸⁵ as preterism also spiritualises some of the passages within these chapters, applying them to the first century or our current day.

Gentry (2010:129–130), for instance, deciphers the symbolism of the temple in Revelation 21 in terms of the preterist perspective. The author agrees that the absence of the temple points to the future, but insinuates that the reason John sees no temple is that “with the coming of the new covenant he disestablishes the external Temple system” (Gentry, 2010:130). Therefore, in Gentry’s (2010:130) mind, “[t]he bride-church is the tabernacle-temple of God.” This passage that is so called eschatology is again re-applied to the past. In the destruction of Jerusalem, as Gentry (2010:130) so aptly reminds us, “This is finalized in A.D. 70.”

Many more examples could be provided. For instance, when Revelation 21:6 and Revelation 22:1–3 refer to the water of life, Gentry (2010:131) again traces it back to the first century where Christ offered living water to the woman at the well, as well as to Acts 2. The very system of preterism keeps on taking one back to the original audience in the day of the author.

⁸⁵ Also see later the heading *New Heavens and New Earth* in this same section where this is more observable.

According to preterism, there are no signs of the times that indicate the nearness of end events or the nearness of Christ's coming. DeMar (1999:77) ridicules those who apply the signs Christ gave in Matthew 24, stating that "[i]n each new prophecy book that hits the bookstores we are told that Bible prophecy is being fulfilled before our eyes. The authors point to various signs that they say are compelling evidence that Jesus' return is near." DeMar (1999:77) insists that "[a]ll the signs that Jesus said would take place before that first-century generation passed away came to pass between A.D. 30 and 70." According to preterism, the signs that Christ gave in Matthew 24 indicated the nearness of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

Preterists even apply the very last signs given by Christ that will lead up to his coming to those affected by the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Luke 21:25–27 reads:

And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

Yet, in the very next verse, Christ plainly states, "Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near" (Luke 21:28). This cannot refer to the redemption of the Christians who escaped the destruction of Jerusalem as preterists want to interpret this verse, for Jesus said that when they see the sign of the Roman armies, they should flee the city. In confirmation, history teaches us that the Christians fled to Pella (Tabaquat Fahil) and could therefore not have been eyewitnesses of this so-called 'spiritual coming' of Christ, as preterists promulgate. The text which describes that the followers of Christ 'will see the Son of Man coming' and then should 'look up and lift up their heads for their redemption draws near' is clearly irreconcilable with preterism that just discards the signs Christ gave as having nothing to do with his glorious Second Coming. Three verses later, Christ also refers to these signs: "So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near" (Luke 21:31). Again, this contradicts the preterist view that the kingdom already came when Christ came with his first coming.

In essence, preterist eschatology adheres to the following perspectives which will be discussed in more detail below:

- A physical future return of Christ will take place in the distant future.
- A real future resurrection will take place in the distant future.
- A divine future judgment will take place in the distant future.
- The New Heavens and New Earth represent a new reality.

While some of these perspectives are in line with orthodox Christian views, certain disagreements also exist.

Partial preterism, the branch of preterism this study engages with, is in harmony with orthodox Christianity regarding the belief in *the literal return of Christ in the distant future*. While Gentry maintains that partial preterism, to which he subscribes, is fully adhering to the doctrine of Christ's literal coming,⁸⁶ De Kock (2013:87) confirms that "the Second Coming of Jesus," which Sproul (2015: loc 2307) terms "the final or ultimate coming of Christ," is "still future" to partial preterists. Yet, the challenge with partial preterists' belief concerning this final coming of Christ is that, according to Chilton (2006:56), it is still "thousands of years to go before the End. We are still in the early Church." Thus, the biblical and eschatological hope is reduced to something so distant that there is no more immediate expectancy left to the believer.

Also, in line with orthodoxy, preterists believe in *a literal resurrection at the very end*. Revelation 20:5–6 refers to two resurrections that preterists dispute: one before the millennium and one after. The problem is that in the preterist context they have a challenge to explain this if the millennium started when Christ established the kingdom with his first coming. Gentry (2010:113) preempts this conundrum when he puts forward the following question: "Since I have already argued that the millennial reign of Christ begins in the first century, to what is John here referring?" Preterists in general argue that "John could be symbolically presenting the new birth as the first resurrection and the

⁸⁶ See: Gentry, KL 1997, *A Brief Theological Analysis of Hyper-Preterism*, Reformed.org, viewed 27 February 2020, <<https://reformed.org/eschatology/a-brief-theological-analysis-of-hyper-preterism-by-kenneth-l-gentry-jr/>>

bodily resurrection from death as a second resurrection” (Gentry, 2010:116). This is totally spiritualising another established church doctrine and reality.

Gentry (2010:121) explains that those who are part of the first resurrection are deceased Christians in heaven who had been martyred in the first century, a typical preterist interpretation. The question then arises whether the second resurrection will also be confined to the first century or whether this will be eschatological in keeping with orthodoxy. Gentry (2010:122) states, “The rest’ of the dead are the ones allied with the first-century beast and his false prophet, the ones responsible for executing the martyrs.” This is inconceivable. This is the danger of preterism. Although not all partial preterists agree with Gentry on this as they still interpret it traditionally and eschatological, if true to preterist principles, they may follow suit. Gentry (2010:122) concludes that John is encouraging his first-century audience to resist the enemy. They will “lie in the chains of darkness until the resurrection at the end of history,” while the martyrs will enter heaven, “come to life” and reign in God’s presence.

The seemingly inherent challenge with preterism is that the longer preterists study, the more eschatological scriptures are preterised and locked in the distant past.

Further in adherence to orthodoxy, partial preterism teaches *a divine future judgment*. This eschatological event will take place “[a]fter the millennial reign” (Eberle, 2017:219) upon which “Jesus will take His seat on the great white throne of judgment.” According to this view, “all of the dead...will stand before Him...The people then will be judged according to the things written in the books” (Eberle, 2017:219–220). The result of this judgment is universal, for “all whose names are written in the book of life will go on into the new heavens and earth. The only alternative destination is the Lake of Fire, which is also called hell” (Eberle, 2017:219–220).

This is the typical standard orthodox view of the final judgment.

While preterists believe in *a future new heavens and earth*, the biblical description thereof is totally spiritualised. Gentry (2010:125) contrasts the orthodox view, that after the physical resurrection, we will enter the new heavens and new earth in renewed physical

bodies, with the preterist view of a “new covenant salvation coming into the world in the first century.”

Gentry sees an image within an image in something that is only literal, according to orthodoxy. And, in the preterist mindset, where does this depiction of the new heavens and earth start? Naturally, in the first century. Gentry (2010:126) confirms this when he writes that “the new creation begins flowing into and impacting history in the first century long before the consummate order.” He then quotes 2 Corinthians 5:17 to equate this ‘new heavens and earth’ to the salvific experience the believer undergoes. Gentry (2010:128) says, “Paul’s declaring ‘old things passed away; behold, new things have come’ also matches closely with God’s statement in Revelation 21:1,5.” To Gentry (2010:128), “this new bride represents the church” and the majestic and “dramatic character of the Revelation” represents “her redemptive standing with God.”

The result is that in the pages of reasoning and explaining of the symbolism that is literal in the first place, the beauty and simplistic truth of the new heavens and earth evaporates. What is left is the impression of the church that replaced the Jews in AD 70.

3.2.7 Victorious eschatology

According to Eberle (2017:1), the pinnacle of preterist eschatology is the view that “the kingdom of God will grow and advance until it fills the earth,” a theological position termed “a victorious eschatology” (Newton, 2012:7). In this paradigm, the inauguration of God’s kingdom is placed at Jesus’ first advent (Newton, 2012:7). Kik (1971:19) writes that Christ came to destroy the works of the devil and in this age of his kingdom on earth, Christ wants to be victorious through his Church. The preterist focus is therefore not on the eschaton as the final victory over the kingdom of evil, but rather on the Church that is establishing God’s kingdom here on earth by the preaching of the gospel. Instead of the expected *parousia* of Christ, the Church is magnified as bringing about God’s victory. Gentry (2010:111) confirms this when he claims, “Contrary to popular opinion today, Jesus discourages us from awaiting his kingdom as if he were going to establish it at his glorious, visible Second Coming.”

The time between Christ's first and second coming is spiritually claimed to be the millennium with the climax of God's kingdom at the second coming. However, this coming of Christ will only take place once the Church has successfully established the kingdom of God on earth. Yet, like they do with all other prophecies to literal events, this time period of the millennium is allegorised and not consistently applied by preterists. Eberle (2017:214) agrees, "Postmillennialists say that 1,000 is a figure of speech and in the context of Revelation 20, it is referring to all of the years that transpire between the first coming of Jesus and His second coming." Ironically, Gentry (2010:103), a preterist himself, admits that "[b]y the very nature of the case, 1000 years does not occur 'shortly'"; yet, he applies it spiritually now to more or less 2000 years. Newton (2012:207) even says, "No one knows the actual length of the Millennium. We are now 2,000 years past its beginning."

Since the Church is trying to establish Christ's reign on earth, preterists argue for a world that does not degenerate but rather improves over time. Newton (2012:8, 233) emphatically declares that the church is not coming to its end and ridicules futurists who object to a present and growing kingdom and who conclude that the world is heading towards apostasy and judgment, seeing the world as getting worse, and believing that only the second coming brings true hope. The question remains: How will we as Christians improve world conditions according to the preterist view? Kik (1971:11) reasons that "[h]owever improbable it may seem that the whole world should be Christianized, we know that God is able to perform what he has promised." Preterism proposes that "Christianity will gain a complete triumph over all false religions; and the visible kingdom of Satan will be destroyed" (Kik, 1971:11). Or, as Newton (2012:81) assures us, "Victorious eschatology teaches the continual growth of the Messianic kingdom until all the nations of the world have been disciplined."

The danger of this theology is that it leads to dominionism. Postmillennialists believe that Christians must take control over most of the secular institutions in the world and become

politically active.⁸⁷ This push for dominion is also known as reconstructionism⁸⁸ or theonomy⁸⁹ and has very specific movements like the New Apostolic Reformation founded by Wagner. According to O'Reggio, "[t]his is no fringe movement, but a rapidly institutionalizing entity larger than most Protestant denomination."⁹⁰ Gulley (1998:213) quotes Terry, stating that the goal is a Christian nation: "We have a biblical duty, we are called by God, to conquer this country." O'Reggio quotes postmillennialist Al Dager in explaining dominion theology, stating that it is predicated upon three basic beliefs: (1) Satan usurped man's dominion over the earth through the temptation of Adam and Eve; (2) The Church is God's instrument to take dominion back from Satan; (3) Jesus cannot come or will not return until the Church has taken dominion by gaining control of the earth's government and societal institutions.⁹¹ Chilton (1994:218) upholds that "Christianity is ultimately the dominant culture, predestined to be the final and universal religion. The church will fill the earth."⁹² This proposed Christian State should rule by God's law, according to Bahnsen, where it should "be enforced by the civil magistrate where and how the stipulations of God so designate" (Gulley, 1998:230). North (1987:56–

⁸⁷ Postmillennial, George Grant, unequivocally states: "Christians have an obligation, a mandate, a commission, a holy responsibility to reclaim the land for Jesus Christ – to have dominion in civil structures, just as in every other aspect of life and godliness. But it is dominion we are after. Not just a voice. It is dominion we are after. Not just influence. It is dominion we are after. Not just equal time. It is dominion we are after. World conquest. That's what Christ has commissioned us to accomplish. We must win the world with the power of the Gospel. And we must never settle for anything less... Thus, Christian politics has as its primary intent the conquest of the land – of men, families, institutions, bureaucracies, courts, and governments for the Kingdom of Christ." (Theocracy Watch, n.d., *Christian Zionism*, Theocracy Watch, viewed 22 March 2020, <http://www.theocracywatch.org/christian_zionism.htm#Postmillennialism>)

⁸⁸ Gulley (1998:226) observes it is because "they seek to reconstruct society according to Christian norms."

⁸⁹ Gulley (1998:226) explains theonomy as focusing "on the place of biblical law to guide society."

⁹⁰ O'Reggio, T 2012, *The Rise of the New Apostolic Reformation and its Implication for Adventist Eschatology*, Andrews University, viewed 22 March 2020, <<http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/church-history-pubs/25>>

⁹¹ O'Reggio, T 2012, *The Rise of the New Apostolic Reformation and its Implication for Adventist Eschatology*, Andrews University, viewed 22 March 2020, <<http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/church-history-pubs/25>>

⁹² Rushdoony (1973:240) expounds that the "first and basic duty of the state is to further the Kingdom of God by recognizing the sovereignty of God and His word and conforming itself to the law-word of God. The state thus has a duty to be Christian. It must be Christian even as man, the family, the church, the school, and all things else must be Christian. To hold otherwise is to assert the death of God in the sphere of the state."

57) argues that the Bible requires an international theocracy where every individual as well as every nation is “under God’s sovereign rule.”

It is disquieting that the preterist hermeneutic leads to such an unsettling conclusion as to call for a universal theocracy. Suffice to say here is that such a theology stems forth from a questionable foundation, similar to that of the dating of the Book of Revelation. Moreover, the expectancy for the coming eschaton and imminent *parousia* is totally removed and is made subject to human endeavour and works, while history testifies to the draconian impact of past attempts to theocracies. A hermeneutic that results in such dangerous reasoning should urge anyone to be cautious.

3.2.8 Construction of the key preterist teachings

Figure 3.3 below illustrates the construction of the key preterist teachings.

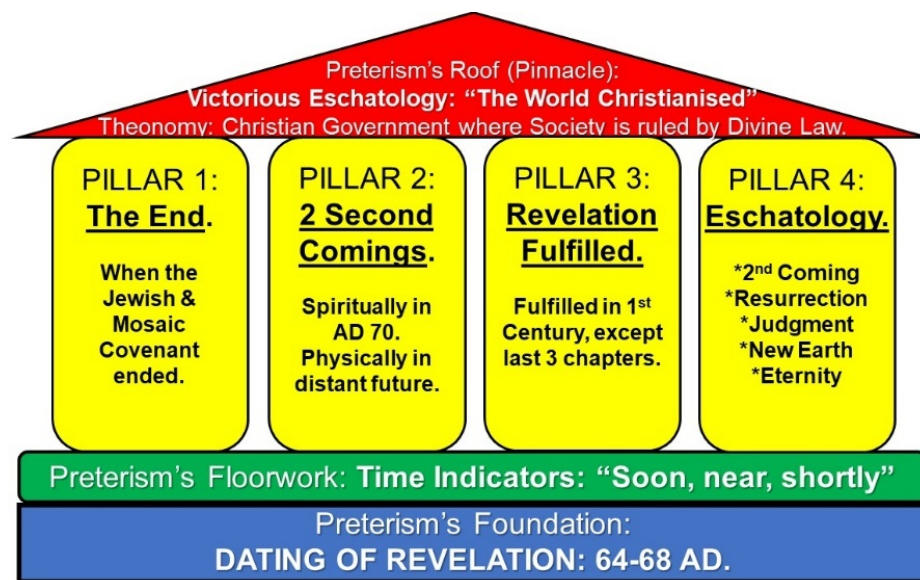


Figure 3.3 Construction of key preterist teachings

The figure shows how preterist teachings are constructed upon the foundation of Revelation’s dating as well as the floorwork of time indicators in Revelation. This gives basis and credence to the four main pillars, namely ‘The End’, ‘2 Second Comings’, ‘Revelation already fulfilled’ and its ‘Eschatology’. These four pillars provide the scope and argument for the preterist ‘victorious eschatology’ which professes that the whole world will be Christianised over a long period of time.

3.3 PRETERISM ANALYSED

In this section, preterism will be analysed against the criteria of the five-tier analysis model proposed in Chapter 2 to determine whether this interpretation school is a theologically adequate hermeneutical approach towards apocalyptic prophecy.

3.3.1 A Christological analysis of preterism

Evaluating whether preterism is Christological can be highly subjective, depending on who performs the exercise. Naturally, a preterist would want to argue that his apocalyptic interpretation is Christological, as would the futurist and historicist. For the purpose of this analysis, I will only focus on what is written in preterist texts.

Studying the Book of Revelation, one observes the Apocalyptic Christ. In the first words of this Apocalypse it is revealed that this book is a revelation of Christ – it concerns Christ first and foremost. However, preterist Kik (1971:38) concludes that the Book of Revelation pertains to the destruction of pagan Rome. This is the very challenge with preterism. While it excels in its scholasticism and understanding of the world of the first reader, it fails in its understanding that the very nature and essence of the Apocalypse is Christ. In the Christological analysis of preterism it will be seen that the vacuum observed is the very matter of the Apocalypse, and thus eschatology – Christ.

In Figure 3.4 below, the preterist hermeneutic (illustrated in black) is superimposed on the threefold ministry dimension of Christ to indicate the Christological focus of preterism.

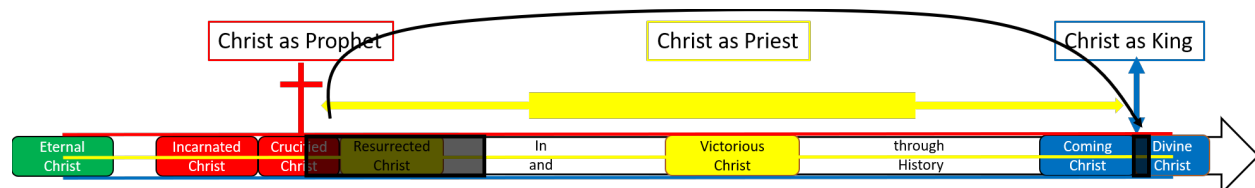


Figure 3.4 Christological focus of preterism

This illustration indicates the lack in the Christological significance of the preterist interpretation. It is a broad way of showing that only certain aspects within Christ's threefold ministry is emphasised by preterism. Granted that this is not an exact reflection

of the Christology of preterism, it does reflect where the emphasis is within this hermeneutic. Reading preterist literature, it is clear that only a certain part of Christ's office as Prophet is emphasised, as is the case with his prophetic and royal office.

In sum, this Christological analysis of preterism is not measuring whether preterist theology contains certain aspects of Christology, but rather whether the hermeneutic of preterism covers, reveals or emphasises the aspects of Christ's threefold ministry, as portrayed within the first chapter of Revelation. A detailed discussion of the analysis follows.

(i) Christ as Prophet

Regarding Christ as Prophet, preterism does portray Christ as teaching and prophesying, and especially foretelling the immediate and the very distant future, but it does not follow through to portray Christ as Prophet in and through history as the One who was, is and is to come.

Preterism portrays Christ as prophet by looking for real historical fulfillments to his prophecies in the first century. Eberle (2017:20), for instance, who analyses Christ's apocalyptic prophecies in Matthew 24, shows how Jesus' words were fulfilled when certain realities happened historically. For preterism, Christ was a prophet and his predictions had to be fulfilled literally, soon. Kik (1971:157) is adamant that all of Christ's prophecies regarding the fate of Jerusalem were literally fulfilled.

Sproul (2015:76) provides background to the notion of prophet by explaining that, while false prophets in Israel, identified by failed predictions, were stoned, a true prophet was identified by fulfilled prophecies. DeMar (1999:47) believes that everything Christ prophesied had to come true, reasoning that if Jesus were wrong, how could the writers of the New Testament, "finite fallible sinners", be trusted? However, while preterists recognise the prophetic office of Christ to a certain extent, this office is not applied in and through history.

As to the Incarnated Christ, preterism does consider Christ's incarnation but not the role it plays in and throughout history. Insignificant references are made to his incarnation, but it is not awarded any eschatological or Christological significance within the Apocalypse.

References made to the incarnation focus more on God's kingdom that was inaugurated with Christ's first coming than on the incarnation itself, as Newton (2012:8) relays, "The kingdom of God came to Earth with Jesus' first coming; it will not arrive in some future coming." DeMar (1999:38) declares that "[t]he last days was in operation in the first century when God was manifested in the flesh in the person of Jesus Christ!"

Concerning the Crucified Christ, preterism does not emphasise nor even consider Christ's crucifixion and its significance, neither does it place it in history, or show its significance through history. Prior to fully researching this question, I assumed that both this phase and the next one about Christ's resurrection would be in harmony with the Christological analysis. However, surprisingly, in the writings of Gentry, Demar, Sproul, Chilton⁹³ and Kik (the five main proponents of postmillennial partial preterism I have been considering in this research), I could find no application of Christ's death nor resurrection within the preterist interpretation of apocalyptic prophecy.⁹⁴ This is why Moltmann (1993:15) describes eschatology as having "a peculiarly barren existence at the end of Christian dogmatics." He relates eschatology to "a loosely attached appendix that wandered off into obscure irrelevancies," reasoning this to be the case if your eschatology bears "no relation to the doctrines of the cross and resurrection, the exaltation and sovereignty of Christ, and did not derive from these by any logical necessity" (Moltmann, 1993:15).

I believe this to be the core challenge with preterism as hermeneutic: It is based and rooted on a model that has no relation to the doctrines of the cross and resurrection, the events that form the very foundation and bedrock of every biblical doctrine. A biblical hermeneutic should be rooted in the incarnate Christ that died and rose for us while acknowledging Christ our Priest looking forward to the Coming Christ as King. "The cardinal point is that no matter which phase of his history we consider, it is in Christ that all these promises are fulfilled," according to König (1989:13). Moltmann (1993:16) agrees

⁹³ Chilton's partial preterism works were considered, before he became a full preterist.

⁹⁴ I did find in an appendix by Newton (2012:279–281) a few paragraphs on the death and resurrection of Christ. But these focused on the kingdom of God and how these two events were part of a series of seven events for God to establish his kingdom that climaxed with Christ's *parousia* in AD 70. This book's subtitle is *A Handbook of Partial Preterist Eschatology* and throughout 27 chapters, before arriving at the appendix, there is no focus on the Crucified or Resurrected Christ – no application to eschatology whatsoever.

as he depicts this to be true of the believer's faith, "For Christian faith lives from the raising of the crucified Christ, and strains after the promises of the universal future of Christ." It is therefore critical that the crucified Christ is part of your apocalyptic hermeneutic since Scripture "speaks of Christ's crucifixion in eschatological terms" (König, 1989:87). König (1989:87) argues that the same is true of Christ's incarnation and his resurrection, as the resurrection of Jesus has "an exceptionally important eschatological meaning." Therefore, when you overlook the importance of the cross and resurrection, eschatology only becomes another part of theology instead of being the molding element. Moltmann (1993:16) emphasises that the eschatological is the "medium of Christian faith, the key in which everything is set."

It is important to note in this context that if preterism reveals Christ as Crucified and Resurrected, the actual focus of eschatology is Christ, "[s]ince he himself is the *eschatos* and *telos* (end or goal), his whole history must be eschatology" (König, 1989:37). The fact that Christ is not only the focus of eschatology but the very *eschatos* and *telos* means that "we must use the term christology when we describe eschatology" (König, 1989:37). Regretfully, it has to be reported that preterism as hermeneutic is void of Christ as Crucified and Resurrected.⁹⁵

(ii) Christ as Priest

As to the Resurrected Christ, preterism does not acknowledge the effect of Christ's resurrection, as explained above, nor does it apply Christ's resurrection in and through history. With regard to the Victorious Christ, preterism does portray Christ as the Victorious Christ, but not so in his priestly office. Although postmillennial (partial) preterism claims to be a victorious eschatology,⁹⁶ the Victorious Christ is based in the

⁹⁵ It may be asked: If preterism as hermeneutic is void of Christ Crucified and Resurrected, why does it seem on the timeline above that preterism covers the stages of Christ Crucified and Resurrected? I did state earlier that the graph is not according to scale. With limited space I had to clearly illustrate the different aspects of the phases of Christ's threefold ministry. Technically, Christ as crucified and resurrected must be at the cross displayed on the graph, and not as widely spread. The graph, which is not precise, is only for the purpose of illustration.

⁹⁶ J. Marcellus Kik wrote his book on partial preterism with the title, *An Eschatology of Victory*. Harold R. Eberle and Martin Trench's treatise on the partial preterist view is titled, *Victorious Eschatology*. Stan

resurrection, with him having the keys of death and hell. Preterists do not view this victory of Christ in terms of his priestly office where he intercedes on the believers' part before the Father, giving salvation that they do not have to die and go to hell, but focus more on the Victorious Christ as the royal Christ, as explained in question 7 below. According to Eberle (2017:1), eschatology "reveals that the kingdom of God will grow and advance until it fills the earth" and this is referred to as "a victorious eschatology". As mentioned in section 3.2.7, Kik (1971:19) believes that "Christ came to destroy the works of the devil" and now "wants to be victorious through his Church."

About Christ as Priest, preterism does not at all reveal Christ as Priest throughout its apocalyptic interpretation. Nothing can be said further, as there is nothing in preterist literature about it.

(iii) Christ as King

In the context of Christ as King, preterism does refer to Christ as King, and it does apply it in and through history. This is not contrary to the hermeneutic of preterism that does not give space to prophetic interpretation in and through history. However, as I will illustrate below, this is just a non-prophetic way of filling up the 'embarrassing' and 'empty' historical timeframe⁹⁷ that does not prophetically portray the threefold ministry of Christ as seen in the Apocalypse. The yellow section in Figure 3.5 below indicates where preterists see the history of the Christian Church establishing God's kingdom on earth as Christ is reigning as King in heaven. This is a theological position, though, and therefore not technically part of preterism, which is a hermeneutic. Preterism sees prophecy fulfilled in the past and a few 'eschatological' prophecies to be fulfilled in the distant future. Mathews (2012:87) points out that this interpretation does not explain "what happens to Christians throughout the entire Christian era." No literal prophetic events are being fulfilled in and through history. Even the millennial reign of Christ and Church throughout the 'kingdom

Newton's handbook on partial preterist eschatology is called *Glorious Kingdom*. Kenneth L. Gentry wrote a book with the preterist principle called *He shall have Dominion*.

⁹⁷ Please note the previous timeline as well as the one portrayed in this section and note the *History* part of the timeline. While there is no apocalyptic prophetic fulfillment during this *History* section, partial preterism does try to fill it with the notion of the Church's reign on earth.

age', which postmillennial preterists want to place throughout Christian history, is just a spiritual or allegorical interpretation with no real or literal fulfilling, as they claim to believe about prophecy. Referring to literal prophetic events, Newton (2012:25) reminds that preterism does not interpret the images as events in our future, but sees these events occurring in the first century.

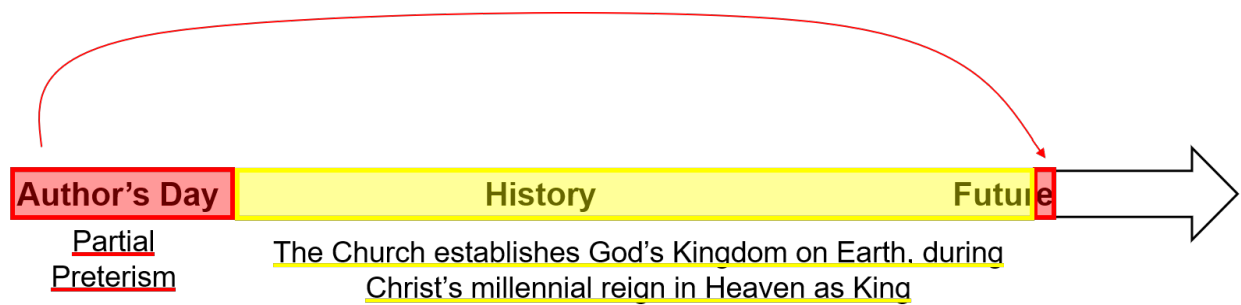


Figure 3.5 Preterist interpretation of God's kingdom on earth as established by the Church

Postmillennial preterism subscribes to dominion theology or, in layman's language, 'Kingdom Now' theology (explained in section 3.2.7). Preterism portrays and focuses on Christ as King through this forth flowing dimension, a paradigm where "victorious eschatology is placing the inauguration of God's kingdom at Jesus' first advent" (Newton, 2012:7). The time between Christ's first coming and second coming is spiritually claimed to be the millennium, with the climax of God's kingdom at the second coming. However, this coming of Christ will only take place once the Church has successfully established the kingdom of God on earth. Yet, in accordance with the preterist method, and as with all other prophecies to literal events, this time period of the millennium is allegorised and not consistently applied. Eberle (2017:214) agrees that, according to postmillennialists, 1000 is a figure of speech where in Revelation 20 it refers to the years that transpire between the first coming of Jesus and His second coming. Newton (2012:207) even says that "[n]o one knows the actual length of the Millennium. We are now 2,000 years past its beginning."

Relating to the Christ as the Coming Christ, preterism does not focus on, nor emphasise Christ as the Coming Christ as does the New Testament and especially biblical apocalyptic prophecy. The Apocalypse is fused with Christ as the Coming Christ. The first

chapter of Revelation starts out with, “Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him” (Revelation 1:7), while the last chapter concludes with Christ promising in his own words, “I am coming quickly...” (Revelation 22:7) “...I am coming quickly...” (Revelation 22:12) “...I am coming quickly...” (Revelation 22:20).

This stands in contrast with the preterist view where there is no looking forward or real expectancy, but only acknowledgement that someday in the very far future Christ will come. Where reference is made to Christ as coming, it is disproportionately out of line with the Apocalypse which has it as main focus. In an overwhelming portion of preterist literature, the focus is almost completely on proving that most apocalyptic prophecies and even the greater New Testament witness of Christ’s coming was fulfilled in AD 70. The literal, personal coming of Christ again to this world after apocalyptic events, as described and predicted by Christ Himself, is being diminished by preterism to a spiritual coming in AD 70. Yet, Christ clearly refers to his second coming in Matthew 24:30.⁹⁸ This clearly stated prophecy has been unanimously interpreted by most commentators throughout the last 2000 years to refer to Christ’s second coming; yet, preterists reinterpret it as being fulfilled in AD 70.⁹⁹

Sproul (2015:578) honestly admits that this passage, which describes the *parousia* in graphic and vivid images, speaking of signs that will be visible and a trumpet that will be audible, poses great difficulty to the narrative and paradigm of partial preterists to interpret this in the far past, with the text itself contradicting this. DeMar (1999:159), however, insists that Matthew 24:30 has “to do with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and [has] nothing to do with modern speculation about a so-called rapture or the bodily return of Christ.”

⁹⁸ “Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30).

⁹⁹ Kik (1971:140,141) argues as follows: “This clause has been thought to relate definitely to the second, visible, and personal coming of the Lord. But in the light of well-defined biblical language, the reference is rather to a coming in terms of the events of his providence in judgment against his enemies and in deliverance of his people.”

Besides, it is not only this classic second coming passage that is ‘preterised’. Many other classic second coming passages are interpreted in this way, including Philippians 3:20–21; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:14–16 and 19–20; 1 Thessalonians 3:11–13; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 10:25,37; James 5:7–9; 1 Peter 4:7; 2 Peter 3:10–13; and Jude 14–19. The reinterpretation does not stop. The list keeps on growing to the extent that the possibility exists that partial preterism (to which research refers as preterism) can end up becoming part of full preterism.¹⁰⁰

This warning must be taken seriously as the partial preterist theologian, Newton, even proceeds to ‘preterise’ 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, which is not only *the* classical second coming passage, but is even revered by most partial preterists as a second coming passage. Newton (2012:222) admits that “[m]ost agree that 1 Thessalonians 4 is about the second coming and not the coming A.D. 70,” and even accepts that most partial preterists would agree. Yet, referring to 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:14–16 and 19–20; and 1 Thessalonians 3:11–13, Newton (2012:222) asks why they should now change their interpretation from the previous three uses. Furthermore, commenting on 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, Newton (2012:223) postulates that the first century readers of this passage “understood the soon coming of the Lord – that it was the final event ending the old Jewish system.” Newton is only rearguing the argument used in Matthew 24. He understands that the first readers of 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 saw this ‘coming of Christ’ as a coming ending the “old Jewish system” and “with this coming, they would be set free

¹⁰⁰ This already took place in the theology of partial preterist David Chilton who authored numerous books on partial preterism but became a full preterist after 1994 before his death in 1997 (Preston, DK 2011, *David Chilton and Full Preterism: The Facts*, BibleProphecy.com, viewed 23 March 2020, <<https://bibleprophecy.com/articles/2011/02/16/david-chilton-and-full-preterism-the-facts/>>). McGeown concludes his article called ‘Preterist Gangrene’ as follows: “The question must be asked: given that most of the eschatological texts have been devoured by the preterist gangrene, what is there to stop the men of Postmillennial Reconstructionism from adopting full-blown preterism? (McGeown, M n.d., *Preterist Gangrene: Its Diagnosis, Prognosis and Cure*, Covenant Protestant Reformed Church, viewed 23 March 2020, <https://cprc.co.uk/articles/preteristgangrene/>) We appreciate the fact that a future Second Advent still occupies a place in their theology, but after ‘preterizing’ most of the New Testament, where will they find Biblical evidence to support this eschatology? Principles work through. How many generations will it take before the Reconstructionist movement, whose champion David Chilton happily informs us that the Second Advent is probably hundreds of thousands of years in the future; whose champion Gary North argues that the prayer ‘Come quickly, Lord Jesus’ is inappropriate for today’s Christians; and whose champion Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., extols the book of hyper-preterist J. Stuart Russell as ‘masterfully written,’ will adopt full-blown preterism’s denial of a future Second Advent, a final judgment and a bodily resurrection of all men?”

and fully engage with the kingdom of God” (Newton, 2012:223). He proposes that these believers “were not expecting to fly off into space, and they were not expecting to leave Earth for heaven,” claiming that “there is no Scripture that points us in that direction” (Newton, 2012:223). This leads to even greater postulation when Newton concludes, “Therefore, in their minds, the thinking may have been that the Lord did come.”

Despite its confession of belief in the second coming, preterism does not have an expectancy for the second coming of Christ. Chilton (2006:56) emphatically declares in reference to the Christian hope regarding the second coming of Christ that we still have “thousands of years to go before the End. We are still in the early Church.” Such eschatological hope is reduced to something so distant that in any coherency can have no immediate expectancy filled with hope for the believer. Mathews (2012:87) concludes that preterism has “[n]o apparent concern about the eschaton” and asks just how far into the future the ‘latter days’ are. In such a system you cannot hope on Christ’s Coming nor even pray the biblical and reformed prayer, “Come quickly, Lord Jesus.” North (1991:179) deduces that “[t]his is not a prayer that is appropriate today.”¹⁰¹

This is precisely the consequence of preterism: Christ’s coming is ‘not appropriate for today’. Evidently, preterism as hermeneutic is not in any way conducive towards *Christ as the Coming Christ!*

In the matter of the Divine Christ, preterism does reveal Christ as being Divine when he will judge the world in the distant future and also resurrect the dead. However, this divinity is not applied in and through history. Preterism does relate to the divinity of Christ in him resurrecting people at his second coming. In this regard, Kik (1971:264) notes, “Death and Hades are cast into the lake of fire after the general resurrection which takes place at the second coming of Christ.” Christ’s divinity is further illuminated in that he conquers death. Kik (1971:264) asserts that “[f]rom that time Death and Hades cease to exist for

¹⁰¹ North states, “That prayer (i.e., “Come quickly, Lord Jesus”) is legitimate only when the one praying it is willing to add this justification for his prayer: “Because your church has completed her assigned task faithfully (Matt. 28:18-20), and your kingdom has become manifest to many formerly lost souls.” This is surely not a prayer that is appropriate today. (It was appropriate for John because he was praying for the covenantal coming of Jesus Christ, manifested by the destruction of the Old Covenant order. His prayer was answered within a few months: the destruction of Jerusalem).”

the saint. The resurrected body of the saint will never be confronted with Death.” The greatest revelation of Christ as Divine occurs in the final judgment scene, which Kik (1971:264) describes as follows: “Christ is seated upon the great white throne.” Kik then proceeds to describe the glorious majesty of the scene and concludes that “[t]o stand before Christ is to stand before God” (Kik, 1971:264).

Regarding Christ in and through history, it has already been established above that only in one instance does preterism portray Christ in his threefold ministry in and through history, namely in his royal office. Preterism is quite vocal about not interpreting eschatological prophecy in and through history. This is illustrated by Gentry’s (1992:493) comments on the eschatological passage in 2 Timothy 3:1, stating that the text

... is speaking of things that *Timothy* will have to face and endure (v. 10, 14).
He is not prophesying regarding the constant, long-term process of history... It is the logical error of quantification to read this reference to (some) seasons of perilous times as if it said all times in the future will be perilous...
 Postmillennialists are well aware of the “seasons” of perilous times which beset the church under the Roman Empire and at other times.

Gentry (1992:493) rules out any historical implication within Paul’s prophetic writing, claiming that it cannot refer to the “constant, long-term process of history.” This is in keeping with the preterist hermeneutic as its very name infers the past as application. In support of this notion, Chilton (1994:225) argues that the “perilous times” referred to in 2 Timothy 3:1 “happened in the first century.” Because of his preterist hermeneutic, he concludes that “[w]e therefore have no Biblical warrant to expect increasing apostasy as history progresses; instead, we should expect the increasing Christianisation of the world” (Chilton, 1994:225). He cannot see any eschatological prophetic application “as history progresses” (Chilton, 1994:225), as preterism interprets prophecy for the first readers. Therefore, it “has no relevance for subsequent history or end events” (Gulley, 1998:66).

Evidently, preterism is limited and cannot be fully Christological in emphasising the threefold ministry of Christ. It is “locking prophetic interpretation within Bible times”

(Mathews, 2012:107), while Christ's ministry stretches beyond biblical times in and through history to the very end of history.

Overall, it can be concluded that preterism, in terms of this analysis, is Christologically limited.

3.3.2 An Apocalyptic analysis of preterism

In this section I will analyse preterism in terms of the criteria of the Apocalyptic Analysis developed in Chapter 2.

Regarding the Apocalypse's *striking contrasts*, preterism does have some aspects of apocalyptic dualism and striking contrasts; however, there is not a clear demarcation between "this world and another world, where the 'other world' may be either spatially or temporally located, or both" (Fiddes, 2000:24). Preterism is very much earth focused, with minor reference to heaven in the nature of striking contrasts of apocalyptic. There may be some striking contrasts in the millennial interpretation where Christ reigns as king from heaven and the Church tries to establish his reign on earth.¹⁰² A further section of preterist interpretation that may "offer revelation both about a parallel reality going on in heaven, and about the final destiny of the world and individuals in 'the age to come'" (Fiddes, 2000:24), is the interpretation of the coming of Christ as a spiritual coming on earth in the destruction of Jerusalem and a real coming in heaven to the Father, as depicted in Daniel 7:13. The one happened at the ascension and the other in AD 70. DeMar (1999:163) explains that "[a]t His ascension, Jesus had come up to the Ancient of Days... to receive the kingdom from His Father..." In AD 70, this "kingdom would be 'taken away from' those who rejected Him" (DeMar, 1999:163), namely the Jews.

As to the Apocalypse's *cosmic sweep*, preterism contains no cosmic sweep of any kind within its apocalyptic interpretation. When Gabel (1996:159) refers to the level of conflict in apocalypses as cosmic, because this battle between good and evil spans history, it means that there should be a clear reference made in apocalyptic interpretation to the

¹⁰² As Kik (1971:19) explains, "Satan was to receive a crushing blow not through a cataclysmic act at the second coming but by the preaching of the gospel" by the Church on earth.

cosmic battle between good and evil as it stretches throughout history. However, within preterism, “[n]o apparent concern is evident over the great controversy between Christ and Satan” (Mathews, 2012:86–87).¹⁰³ There is no full sweep of history, but a concentrated focus on mainly the first century. Thus, “the book of Revelation has next-to-nothing to say to believers through the last 1,800 years” (Matthew, 2012:86).

In the matter of the Apocalypse’s *eschatological emphasis*, preterism in its very nature is opposed to an eschatological emphasis.¹⁰⁴ Whereas apocalyptic literature emphasises an end in history, preterism in its apocalyptic interpretation totally ignores this nature of apocalyptic and argues for a forever continuation of history where even the final coming of Christ (of which Chilton (2006:56) declares that there are still “thousands of years to go” to the second coming) will just be a further continuation of world history. Newton (2012:233–239) supports this interpretation when he exegetes the scriptural passage of 2 Peter 3:10, which has traditionally been understood to indicate an end in time and of history, to mean the opposite. After his exegesis, he concludes that the notion of God bringing an end to history “has no basis in Scripture” (Newton, 2012:238).¹⁰⁵ Preterism argues for a world that does not degenerate but rather improves over time. Newton (2012:8) postulates that “[t]he church is not coming to its end” and ridicules futurists that “object to a present and growing kingdom”, people who “conclude that the world is heading towards apostasy and judgment” (Newton, 2012:233). Whereas “[t]hey see the world as getting worse, and only the second coming brings true hope” (Newton, 2012:233), Newton (2012:8) emphatically declares that “[o]ur World is not ending!” Stephens (2018:161) concurs that “[s]ince the world isn’t doomed to get worse, it has the potential of becoming better. We have the potential to make that happen.” How will we as

¹⁰³ Davidson (2007, as cited in Du Preez, 2007:52) mentions that, in apocalyptic literature, prophetic visions often present the full sweep of history, from the time of the prophet to the end of time. Hence, this should be clearly present within the preterist interpretation; yet, it is not.

¹⁰⁴ Robinson (2007, as cited in Porter, 2007:16) makes it clear that the nature of apocalyptic has a distinct eschatological emphasis, arguing that “apocalyptic literature emphasizes both a transcendent or supernatural world and universal or a cosmological outlook that goes beyond specific situations toward the end of history and eschatological salvation.”

¹⁰⁵ Strand (1979:18) explains this ‘end of history’ notion as emphasis on eschatology within apocalyptic as “a history which tends even to degenerate as it proceeds in time.”

Christians improve world conditions, according to the preterist view? Kik (1971:11) responds, “However improbable it may seem that the whole world should be Christianized, we know that God is able to perform what he has promised.” Instead of acknowledging that “history is moving toward an end” (Strand 1979:18), preterism proposes that “Christianity will gain a complete triumph over all false religions; and the visible kingdom of Satan will be destroyed” (Kik, 1971:11).

Considering the Apocalypse’s *implied ethic*, the Practical Relevance Analysis will clearly show that preterism has no ethical relevance as it voids biblical apocalyptic from the blessed hope, thereby depriving it of its very implied ethic, as will be seen in section 3.3.5.

Concerning the Apocalypse’s *origin in times of distress*, preterism fully incorporates this aspect of apocalyptic into its interpretation. Gentry (2010:33) agrees that when John wrote the Apocalypse, he “was ministering to a persecuted minority.” Eberle (2017:125) supports this, stating that Revelation was written “to be an encouragement to suffering Christians.”¹⁰⁶ It is thus evident that preterism indeed argues for an Apocalyptic that originated in times of distress.

Regarding the Apocalypse’s *basis in visions and dreams*, preterism indeed recognises the basis of biblical apocalyptic in dreams and visions. For instance, Newton (2012:61–62), when referring to the prophecies in Daniel, mentions Daniel’s dream and his vision.

About the Apocalypse’s *extensive use of symbolism*, preterism’s hermeneutical system not only acknowledges apocalyptic use of symbolism but is pertinent to interpret it correctly. DeMar (1999:160), in recognition of symbolism in an endeavor to decode it, uses deciphering speech like ‘language’, ‘imagery’ and ‘description’. Preterism values the importance of interpreting apocalyptic symbolism. Kik (1971:128), for instance, recounts

¹⁰⁶ “In Acts 8:1, we are told that such a “*great persecution*” rose against the Church that the Christians in Jerusalem had to leave their homes and were scattered throughout the surrounding regions... they were unwilling to worship the gods of the empire and recognize Caesar as Lord. Then in A.D. 64... Emperor Nero began the terrible persecution in which tens of thousands of Christians were beaten and tortured... and publicly murdered. This was the context in which the book of Revelation was written. It was meant to be an encouragement to suffering Christians. In the midst of the judgments and destruction being foretold in the book, the early Christians were reassured that God was ruling from heaven and He will subdue all of their enemies” (Eberle, 2017:125).

how Christ “describes this catastrophe through the use of scriptural symbols” in reference to Christ’s apocalyptic prophecies in Matthew 24.

Relating to the Apocalypse’s use of *composite symbolism*, in keeping with preterism’s value of symbolism, this may be the case in some isolated instances. Still, this research could not identify clear interpretation of substantial composite imagery within the apocalypse. When Gentry, in his book about the Apocalypse, *The Book of Revelation made Easy*, extensively deals with symbolism, he not once mentions composite symbolism or how it should be interpreted.

In the context of *eschatology from outside of history*, preterism does not acknowledge that the very nature of the Apocalypse denotes a future eschatology from outside of history. Preterism interprets Christ’s coming as his first coming, bringing God’s kingdom into history; yet, the Apocalypse was written years after Christ had come. In truth, the Book of Revelation is apocalyptic, pronouncing a future eschatology where the God outside of history, who has worked within history in the classical prophetic sense, will break into history “from somewhere beyond history” and bring “an end to the history” (Moltmann, 1993:15). Preterism is opposed to this very fact.

As to *divine sovereignty and unconditionality*, this research could not find any direct explanation or acknowledgement within preterist literature regarding this essential apocalyptic characteristic. There may be an agreement to it in its overall interpretation, for instance in Gentry’s comments about God’s sovereignty in his theological paradigm; however, nothing appears in his preterist explanations. Nowhere could any reference or description of God’s sovereignty be found as seen through the outworking of prophecy in historical events of which preterists like Gentry (2010:22) do admit that the Apocalypse “certainly deals with factual historical events.”

Preterism in essence rejects the apocalyptic characteristic of Divine Sovereignty coupled with cosmic sweep when “it sees a rather limited judgment of the world focused on Jerusalem” (Mathews, 2012:87) in contrast to the apocalyptic books of Daniel and Revelation that portray a universal judgment and global effect of God’s act in history. Preterism reduces God’s acts and sovereignty in and through history to mere localised and time limited events almost 2 millennia ago. While an attempt may be made to fit these

into a sovereign 'paradigm,' it is mere reactionary judgment from God's side in a classical prophetic context on an unfaithful people, namely the Jews, which destroys any unconditionality. In such "classical prophecy, conditionality is a fundamental feature, as two possible scenarios are delineated to the prophet's own generation,¹⁰⁷ the way of blessing or curses, dependent on the covenant response of the people," according to Davidson (2007, as cited in Du Preez, 2007:51). This conditionality is clearly part of the foundation of preterism where it is indicated that the judgment on Jerusalem in AD 70 (which fulfills most of the apocalyptic prophecies according to preterism) is because of the unfaithfulness of the Jews to the covenant and their rejection of the Messiah.¹⁰⁸

Evidently, preterism proves not to be true to apocalyptic.

3.3.3 A prophetic image analysis of preterism

Apocalyptic prophecy is filled with prophetic imagery which should be interpreted carefully and correctly. I will now evaluate preterism according to the Prophetic Image Analysis developed in Chapter 2.

Preterism correctly sees the possibility that one image can be fluid in different contexts. Preterism is also very proficient in decoding symbolism; yet, it does not always show an understanding of the reasons for the use of these symbols. The preterist interpreter is interpreting the symbol through a preterist understanding. To Gentry's (2010:21) mind, for instance, "John writes Revelation while anticipating events looming in his own day. He is not writing about events two or three thousand years distant." This preterist understanding directly influences the way these apocalyptic symbols will be interpreted. Gentry (2010:21) concludes, "Our understanding of the main thrust of Revelation, then, must be 'preteristic' rather than 'futuristic'."

¹⁰⁷ This is one of the downfalls of preterism, where it is focused not only on the local instead of the cosmic but also on the prophet's own generation instead of on a future not part of the prophet's time as is indicative of apocalyptic.

¹⁰⁸ Hollet (2018:3636), describing the rationale of partial preterism, states, "According to preterism, the destruction of the Jewish kingdom and temple in AD 70 demonstrates that God has divorced the Jews for disobeying him and rejecting his Son."

Gentry's interpretation of the new heavens and earth in Revelation 21 is an example of this preterist understanding. Whereas the majority of scholars literally interpret it as an eschatological reality, preterists like Gentry cannot refrain from 'preterising' it. Gentry (2010:125), succumbing to his preterist outlook, asserts that John's image of a new creation is a picture of "new covenant salvation coming into the world in the first century." Gentry (2010:128) primarily and spiritually applies the new heavens and earth to salvation and quotes 2 Corinthians 5:17 with the comment, "Paul's declaring 'old things passed away; behold, new things have come' also matches closely with God's statement in Revelation 21:1, 5." Gentry sees a symbol where there is none. He takes a clear, literal reality and not only applies it spiritually; but even transfers this future eschatological reality to the distant past, maintaining, "[T]he new creation begins flowing into and impacting history in the first century long before the consummate order." It is thus clear that the reasons for apocalyptic symbols used are not always correctly understood by preterism.

Further to source recognition, preterism does not always recognise the source of the symbols it interprets. This may once again be because of its very system which projects everything to the first century.

Gentry (2010:117) correctly presents that "[i]n Revelation, John takes images from the Old Testament Scriptures – often *reworking*, *restructuring*, and *reapplying* them." Gentry (2010:117) understands that John is "effectively mining the Scriptures for material that he can use to construct his own symbolic world." However, Gentry's paradigm of understanding these symbols is blurred by his preterist views. This is visible when he concludes that John's "symbolic world primarily presents the dramatic first-century Judeo-Christian historical experience leading up to and including the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70" (Gentry, 2010:117).

Gentry (2010:104–105) explains why the 1000 years in Revelation 20 should be taken symbolically and then immediately proceeds to the binding of Satan during this time period. He comments that the "Lord Jesus Christ himself clearly asserted that he was binding Satan during his earthly ministry" (Gentry, 2010:105). Later, he suggests that Christ "defines his casting out of demons by a parable that shows that *Satan is being bound*" (Gentry, 2010:106). This is quite ironic, for previously we saw how Gentry

interpreted a literal reality as symbolic, whereas in this prophecy he is interpreting symbolism as literal, owing to the fact that he is not recognising the source of the symbol. Gentry is well aware that he is taking the binding of Satan literally, for he states that Satan “is rendered totally inoperative. Taken literally, the imagery of Revelation 20 suggests just such an interpretation” (Gentry, 2010:107).

To determine the source of the symbolic binding Gentry does not recognise, it is necessary to look more closely at the word ‘bound’ as it is used here. The Greek word used in Revelation 20:2 is *δέω* (*deo*), which means to ‘bind’, ‘capture’ or to ‘be chained’. It ties directly into the source of the symbolism in verse one which mentions the chain with which Satan will be bound. The simple biblical question should be: Can Satan be bound by a literal chain? As all biblical data indicate the contrary, clearly this binding of Satan must be solely symbolical. Suffice to state that within preterism, the source of the symbol is not always recognised.

In a simple sense, preterism respects the symbols of Revelation; however, it does not always respect that the symbol is used within apocalyptic literature or that the symbol is not in harmony with its hermeneutical structure. Preterist respect for symbolism is obvious in Gentry’s (2010:22) disapproval of literalism in a clearly symbolic environment when he highlights as a problem “the assumption of literalism when approaching Revelation.” The preterist respect for biblical symbolism is also evident when Gentry (2010:22) argues,

[I]n his Gospel, John shows the problem of literalism among Christ’s early hearers: by thinking in a rigidly literal way, they misconstrue Jesus’ teaching regarding the temple (John 2:19-22), being born again (3:3-10), drinking water (4:10-14), eating his flesh (6:51-56), being free (8:31-36), being blind (9:39-40), falling asleep (11:11-14), and his being king (18:33-37). The problem is exacerbated in Revelation with its rich imagery field.

Gentry (2010:22) declares that the author of Revelation, John, “specifically informs his readers of the symbolic nature of his visions, and provides insights into how the reader should transpose his visions to understand his point.” Yet, preterism does not always respect the symbol in its relationship to the main theme that contains it. This is illuminated

by Gentry's (2010:129–130) explanation of the symbolism of the temple in Revelation 21.¹⁰⁹ I have appreciation for Gentry's textual references that reveal the church as being likened to a temple. Still, this is another example of how preterism does not always see apocalyptic symbolism as fluid and does not respect the symbol in its relationship to the main theme that contains it. In addition, it shows that preterism does not consider the symbol within its immediate and literary context, as will be discussed in the next question. Gentry (2010:130) deciphers the symbolism of the temple in this passage, asserting that "[t]he bride-church is the tabernacle-temple of God." This cannot be the case as the *very text* he quotes says, "And I saw no temple in it, for *the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple.*" (Rev. 21:22) (emphasis mine). It is thus clear that preterism does not always respect the symbol in terms of its relationship to the main theme within which it appears.

As to immediate and literary context, preterism in many instances does consider the symbols of Revelation in its immediate and literary context. Gentry (2010:22) clarifies that "[w]hen interpreting *any* literary work, we should always listen carefully to the author himself, especially if he provides information affecting the proper approach to interpreting his work." However, preterism does not always follow through in this regard.

Concerning the incredible vivid description of the New Jerusalem, Gentry (2010:132) maintains, "Revelation now presents glorious imagery that ultimately reflects our heavenly home as the Church Victorious." Please note that the description of this city only reflects the New Jerusalem in the mind of Gentry. To him it is not an absolute reality but instead

¹⁰⁹ "John's vision of the new creation Jerusalem sees no Temple, which was so familiar to God's covenant people since the time of Solomon (950 B.C.). Initially, John frames the vision in terms of the tabernacle: 'And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them' (Rev. 21:3). He finally replaces the tabernacle imagery with the temple, showing that a physical temple will no longer be needed: 'And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple' (Rev. 21:22). Though God established his holy Temple as the centerpiece of worship for his old covenant people, with the coming of the new covenant he disestablishes the external Temple system. The bride-church is the tabernacle-temple of God (Rev. 21:3) because God dwells within her, and no literal temple is needed (Rev. 21:22; cp. Eph 2:19–22; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9). The old Jerusalem with its physical Temple "made with hands" is passing away as the new Jerusalem without the Temple supplants it (Heb. 8:13; 9:11, 24; 12:18–28). This is finalized in A.D. 70" (Gentry, 2010:130).

only symbolism, whereas almost all scholars agree that these are eschatological and eternal realities. He continues by asserting that this description of the New Jerusalem “applies to the Church Militant as she appears before God’s eyes even while existing on earth. John speaks of the Church in exalted terms” (Gentry, 2010:132). He then quotes Revelation 21:9–21 that portrays the glorious description of the New Jerusalem in particular and unmatched detail (Gentry, 2010:132). Gentry (2010:133–136) uses these eschatological realities as symbolism of the Church with ample scriptural proof to build this model on and finds that it depicts the following: The Church as Light; The Church as Secure; The Church as Influential; The Church as Healer.

Further to this last notion of *The Church as Healer*, Gentry (2010:136) uses the reality of the tree of life with its leaves that are for healing as a symbol in declaring that “Christ initiates these new covenant blessings during his earthly ministry... [w]hen Jesus comes in the first century, he comes to heal...” The interpretation is back in the first century, not considering the immediate context that speaks about literal realities or the literary context of apocalyptic, thus declaring eschatological realities to be symbolism and taking it back to the first century.

Evidently, preterism is not always consistent in considering the symbol within its immediate and literary context. Overall, from the above it is evident that preterism mostly satisfies the prophetic image analysis.

3.3.4 An exegetical analysis of preterism

Three key questions of the exegetical analysis correlate directly with the Antichrist found in 2 Thessalonians Chapter 2. It is therefore imperative that I point out here that partial preterism neither acknowledges the ‘lawless one’ or ‘man of sin’ in 2 Thessalonians as the Antichrist, nor does it interpret the ‘beast out of the sea’ in Revelation 13 to be the Antichrist.¹¹⁰ As such, it rejects almost two millennia of coherency amongst biblical scholars that this power in 2 Thessalonians and Revelation 13 constitutes the

¹¹⁰ The same way it does not interpret the little horn power in Daniel 7 to be the antichrist, but Antiochus Epiphanes IV.

Antichrist.¹¹¹ The main reason seems to be that preterism wants to refute futurism with all of its populist notions concerning this singular individual that will rule the world.

DeMar (1999:269) declares that “you will not find the word antichrist in the Book of Revelation. This is significant since the John who defines antichrist for us in his first two letters is the same John who penned the Book of Revelation.” This is true; however, to state that there is no Antichrist in the Book of Revelation, based on the fact that the same term by the same author is not used, is irresponsible exegesis.¹¹² Can we safely deduce that there is no Holy Spirit in the Book of Revelation based on the fact that John not once mentions the παράκλητος (*parakletos*) in Revelation but describes the Holy Spirit as such in John 14, 15 and 16? Certainly not. The Holy Spirit is indeed described in Revelation, only in different terms. Why should that not be the case for the Antichrist?

Preterists would argue that “according to the Bible [the] antichrist is not a single individual” (DeMar, 1999:269). This is correct. They would further argue that instead of one Antichrist, “John... could point to the rise of ‘many antichrists’” (DeMar, 2001:141). This is correct too. However, preterists are overreacting in their endeavour to refute futurism.¹¹³ If these passages are considered objectively in a consistent manner, no evidence is found to indicate that the man of lawlessness and the beast of Revelation cannot be the Antichrist. Yet, preterists maintain that “the biblical descriptions of the antichrist, the beast, and the man of lawlessness are very different from one another” (Eberle, 2017:267). Is this true?

The common mistake interpreters make when studying the term *Antichrist*, coined by the prophet John, is to assume that it refers to someone or a power against Christ. Futurist Richard Gentry (2014:138) correctly states that ‘Antichrist’ does not only mean ‘against

¹¹¹ The largest historical study done to my knowledge on prophetic interpretation is by L.E. Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of our Fathers*. Preterists, futurists and historicists alike all quote from it as authoritative. In this voluminous study, history testifies how the majority of scholars equated Daniel 7, 2 Thessalonians and Revelation 13 to be the Antichrist Power.

¹¹² Preterists argue again that those who link 2 Thess. 2 with Rev. 13, etc. to be the Antichrist are not only doing “bad exegesis” but are also “just plain wrong” (Newton, 2012:183).

¹¹³ Much of preterism’s literature is written apologetically from a defense standpoint as well as to refute futurism.

Christ' but also 'in the place of Christ'. In the same vein, De Kock (2013:103), a historicist, explains that the prefix 'anti-' in Greek does not only signify 'against' but also 'instead' or 'in the place of', while the Latin *vicarius* – originally an adjective – means 'a deputy', or somebody 'put in place of.' Even preterist Gentry (2012: loc 1203) admits that '*Anti*' can mean substitution or opposition, indicating that both ideas are identical in the word *antichristos*. With this considered, 'Antichrist' means a power 'opposed to' Christ and 'in the place of' Christ. Preterist Eberle (2017:175) argues that there is no biblical basis to relate the beast of Revelation with the Antichrist; yet, the fact that the Antichrist power means 'in the place of Christ' correlates directly with the overarching theme of Revelation 13. The brief comparison in Table 3.2 below between biblical references to Christ and Revelation 13's references to the Sea Beast (Antichrist) substantiates this.

Table 3.2 A brief comparison between Jesus Christ and the Antichrist (Sea Beast of Revelation 13)

Jesus Christ	Revelation 13 (Sea) Beast
Rises from the water and starts with His ministry! (Matt. 3:16)	Rises from the sea and starts his work! (Rev. 13:1)
Jesus represents his Father. (John 14:9)	The Antichrist has 7 heads & 10 horns. (Rev. 13:1) Just like his father Satan. (Rev. 12:3)
Jesus has 7 horns – perfect power (Rev. 5:6) and crowns – royal authority. (Rev. 19:11,12)	The Antichrist also has horns – power & crowns – royal authority. (Rev. 13:1)
Jesus receives his authority from his Father. (Matt. 28:18)	The Antichrist receives his power, throne and authority from Satan. (Rev. 13:2,4)
Jesus' ministry was 3.5 years. Baptised AD 27 and crucified in AD 31.	The work or rule of the Antichrist was 3.5 prophetic years. (Rev. 13: 5)
Jesus was crucified and then rose again. (Matt. 27)	The Antichrist receives a deadly wound and rises again. (Rev. 13: 3)
Jesus receives worship after His resurrection. (Rev. 4 and 5)	The Antichrist receives worship after His resurrection. (Rev. 13:3,4)
Jesus receives Universal rule. (Mat 28:18)	The Antichrist receives universal rule. (Rev. 13: 7)

Scholars over almost two millennia clearly are not wrong in viewing the beast rising from the sea in Revelation 13 as the Antichrist power. As illustrated in Table 3.2 above, when it is studied and compared with the ministry of Christ, it is clear that it is a mimicking power, setting itself in the place of Christ. The sea beast of Revelation 13 is therefore a truly Antichristian power – it is Antichrist. Still, Eberle (2017:267) maintains that there is no proper basis to claim that the 'Antichrist', 'the beast', and 'the man of lawlessness'

were the same individual. A brief comparison in Table 3.3 below to determine whether the lawless power in 2 Thessalonians is comparable to the beast power rising from the sea in Revelation 13 reveals the following:

Table 3.3 A comparison between the 'lawless power' and the 'beast rising from the sea'

2 Thessalonians 2: Lawless Power	Revelation 13: (Sea) Beast
Man of sin (v.3)	A mouth speaking great things and blasphemies (v.5)
Son of perdition/destruction (v.3)	Makes war with the saints and overcomes them. (v.7)
Opposes and exalts himself above God. (v.4)	Opened his mouth in blasphemy against God. (v.6)
Sits as God in the temple of God. (v.4)	His throne. (v.2). They worshipped the beast, saying who is like the beast? (v.4)
Showing himself that he is God (v.4)	And all the world marveled and followed the beast. (v.3)
The mystery of lawlessness (v.7)	No one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name the beast. (v.17)
Will be destroyed by God (v.8)	Will be killed by the sword (v.10)
It is coming by the working of Satan. (v.9)	Satan gave him his power, his throne and great authority. (v.2)
Power, signs and lying wonders (v.9)	Deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast (v.14)

There can be no doubt that 'the lawless power' in 2 Thessalonians 2 is also the Antichristian power, the Antichrist. Some partial preterists are starting to see these direct parallels. The most recent is Gentry (2012:loc 2776) who relates the Revelation 13 beast to Nero¹¹⁴ and at length compares it to 2 Thessalonians' man of lawlessness, concluding

¹¹⁴ Why cannot the beast and man of lawlessness be the Antichrist if Gentry (2012, loc 2801) says that "Nero, the Man of Lawlessness himself, becomes the enemy of Christianity"? In referring to 2 Thessalonians 2, Gentry (2012, loc 2801) even states that "obvious parallels exist between Matthew 24 and Revelation 13". Gentry (2010:58), referring to the identity of the Beast, explains, "Corporately, the Beast is the Roman empire, specifically, he is Nero Caesar, its contemporary head." DeMar and the other partial preterists agree. Gentry (2010:62) further elaborates how "Nero happens not only to be the first emperor to persecute the Christian church, but is also the authority who commissioned the Roman general Vespasian to attack and destroy Jerusalem." Some preterists may argue that Nero did not destroy Jerusalem eventually. This may be true, but in preterist writings it is acknowledged that the next leadership were all part of the Beast prophecy. Gentry (2010:71) confirms it by relating how it all fits into prophecy, "Nero dies by his own sword wound... Beast receiving a deadly wound to 'one of his heads'... the Empire revives to the astonishment of the world..." So, Rome destroyed Jerusalem, which is also according to this interpretation destroyed by the *parousia* of Christ. Or, in the words of DeMar (1999:125), "in A.D. 70 Rome was sent by God" to destroy Jerusalem. Denoting that God used Rome as judgment and destruction against Jerusalem. This is confusing in the lightest sense of the word.

Recently, Gentry (2012, loc 2776) had further insight regarding the notion that this Apocalyptic Beast is also the Antichristian man of lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians. How does this influence the interpretation above when this beast should be destroyed by God (but is the one destroying Jerusalem)? Gentry (2012, loc 2776) tries to make sense in writing, "Not only does Jerusalem collapse within twenty years, but Nero himself dies a violent death in the midst of the Jewish War (June 8, A.D. 68). His death occurs in the Day of the Lord, which is Christ's judgment-coming against Jerusalem. Paul tells us that he will die by the breath

that “in the judgment-coming against Jerusalem there is also judgment for the Man of Lawlessness, Nero.”

Yet, since partial preterism in general neither acknowledges the ‘lawless one’ or ‘man of sin’ in 2 Thessalonians as the Antichrist, nor interprets the ‘beast out of the sea’ in Revelation 13 to be the Antichrist, the three key questions of the exegetical analysis that tie directly to the Antichrist will in all fairness not be discussed. Consequently, I shall only deal with the remaining two questions that apply to preterism.

(i) Does this interpretation view the Parousia to be literal, real and observable?

Preterism is spiritualising the literal, real and observable *Parousia* in 2 Thessalonians 2:1. DeMar (1999:274) asks, regarding the *Parousia* in 2 Thessalonians 2:1, whether it is a reference to the Second Coming, which is a future event, or whether it is a “coming in judgment upon first-century Jerusalem that would be the event to bring the ‘last days’ to a close.”

In addition, Gentry (2012, loc 2472) interprets the *Parousia* in 2 Thessalonians 2:1 as “the A.D. 70 judgment on the Jews – the very judgment emphasized in the first portion of the Olivet Discourse, the Book of Revelation, and numerous other passages of Scripture.” He thus reduces the literal, real and observable coming of Christ to a spiritual event of judgment on Jerusalem in the very distant past.

DeMar (1999:274) bases his explanation for this spiritualising of a clearly literal and real event on scripture, arguing that the word translated as ‘coming’ in verse 1 is the Greek word *parousia*, which is best translated as ‘presence’ in other contexts (2 Cor. 10:10; Phil 2:12). This is not correct. The word *parousia* is used 24 times in the New Testament and only twice is it denoting ‘presence’. Yet, DeMar (1999:274) proceeds to justify a spiritual coming, declaring that, since the Bible’s use of ‘coming’ does not always mean bodily presence, as so many Old and New Testament passages indicate, translating *parousia* as ‘coming’ is not at all improper. This is totally incorrect. In all 24 instances where the word *parousia* is used in the New Testament, it refers to a real bodily and physical

of Christ. This is like the Old Testament prophecy of the Lord’s destroying Assyria with his coming and the breath of his mouth (Isa. 30: 27–31).”

'presence' in its coming/advent/arrival, as shown in detail in Chapter 2. Not once does the word *parousia* imply a non-physical or spiritual event.

Preterists realise this and therefore try to emphasise the realness of Jerusalem's destruction. Still, they cannot escape the fact that there was no physical appearance of Christ. Meek (2016:87), for instance, indicates that although the Parousia was "very real and historically discernible," the effects of his coming would be clearly seen, not his physical appearance.

Therefore, one can conclude that preterism does not interpret the *Parousia* in 2 Thessalonians 2:1 as literal, real and observable but rather as spiritual, with only its effects being observable and real.

(ii) Does this interpretation view God to be in control of end events?

While preterism does claim God's reign and victory through the Church, God's sovereignty, which is observable in and through prophecy, is not acknowledged within preterist literature. As preterism depicts prophecies fulfilled around the author's day, it is basically impossible to trace God's acts, and thus his sovereignty, through time.

Yet, this question relates directly to God's sovereignty. Preterism is basically showing how God is only reactionary with the judgment on Jerusalem in AD 70, as was indicated earlier regarding the question: *Is this interpretation recognising the Apocalypse's Divine Sovereignty and Unconditionality?* It has already been established that preterism reduces God's acts and sovereignty in and through history to mere localised and time limited events. Preterist confirmation that there is no visibility of God's sovereignty within the prophecies, and then affirming that God is in control is insufficient, as I am not referring to allusions but clearly defined and observable indicators within the exegesis of these prophecies by partial preterists. There is none.

The exegetical analysis applied here is not totally indicative of preterist exegesis as there are other passages that preterism exegetes well. Yet, it does reveal that key apocalyptic passages are not exegeted well, which indicates a fatal flaw within preterism. Preterism does excel in terms of incorporating ample references to scripture and original background and comparisons in its literature. However, when scrutinised, preterism

shows a myriad of cracks exegetically as the data are manipulated in certain instances to make the texts fit their narrative, as indicated in the first question above.

3.3.5 A practical relevance analysis of preterism

This last analysis of preterism is performed through the application of the Practical Relevance Analysis presented in Chapter 2.

It can be argued that the preterist principles of Christ being King and victorious offers hope. Newton (2012:81) maintains that preterism “stands alone as the one eschatological theology that believes this present world experiences the knowledge of God’s glory like the Old Testament promises.” This might pose some hope, as it is not visible at all. However, Newton (2012:81) then concludes that “Jesus received the kingdom... and now reigns as king over all. There is no waiting.” Yet, Scripture relates waiting to hope,

For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance (Romans 8:24–25).

If there is no waiting or expectation, how can there be any hope?

In addition, Gentry (2010:111) maintains that “Jesus discourages us from awaiting his kingdom as if he were going to establish it at his glorious, visible Second Coming.” Yet, Scripture admonishes us, “Be as calm in your waiting; let your hearts be strong: because the coming (*parousia*) of the Lord is near” (James 5:7, BBE). It is the expectancy of Christ’s coming that brings about hope. Scripture states, “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?” (1 Thessalonians 2:19)

What keeps believers going is the expectant hope in a God that sustains us (Migliore, 2004:352). Eschatology is directly tied to hope. Migliore (2004:348) terms eschatology “[t]he symbols of Christian hope – the coming of Christ in glory, the resurrection of the dead, the last judgment, the promise of eternal life...” Yet, as Mathews (2012:86) asserts, when applying preterist principles, Revelation has little to say to believers through the last 1800 years. It does not portray the hopeful imminent coming eschaton Moltmann

(1993:16) reveals when he states, “Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving.” The promised coming of Christ is the root of apocalyptic that portrays an eschaton of hope – not only for the future, but also bringing hope to the present. This is completely absent within preterism. Chilton (2006:56) illuminates this absence when he pronounces that we still have “thousands of years to go before the End. We are still in the early Church.” Such eschatological hope is reduced by preterism to something so distant that it presents no expectant hope for the believer.

While there may be a glimmer of possibility for hope, there is no sufficient hope in preterist interpretation to bring any sense into the present. How can there be any sense of the present in prophecies fulfilled in the very distant past? As indicated by Mathews (2012:87), the relevance of Revelation seems limited for today’s Christian when looked at from a preterist view.

Moreover, as seen earlier, preterism does not reveal the sovereignty of God in the present by indicating God’s control over history and world events through apocalyptic. How then can there be any sense in the present? Johnson (2001, as cited in Dederen, 2001:801) confirms that the believers who through apocalyptic have hope, “have the confidence that God is in control of the flow of history and of their lives.” Clearly, apocalyptic cannot be divorced from the present and the lives lived by believers. As seen in Chapter 2, apocalyptic prophecy was not given in isolation but was born in times of distress. Likewise, it will be beneficial to our present lives lived in stress. Preterism falls short here as “it removes present-day relevance” (Letseli, 2009:4). How can we make sense of pain and suffering in the present if, as advocated by preterism, the “kingdom of God has already come in its fullness...” (Newton, 2012:99)? How is it possible to believe in a God who cares if this present condition filled with pain and suffering is the fullness of his kingdom and there is nothing better to be hoped for or expected?

There is no way that eschatology can be understood in isolation from our present situation. Eschatology “must formulate its statements of hope in contradiction to our present experience of suffering, evil and death” (Moltmann, 1993:19). Our present situation impacts and informs our view of eschatology in the same interdependency as which our eschatology impacts and informs the sense we make of our present condition.

If then our eschatology is but that God's kingdom is already here in its fullness, the following may be reality: A present situation of suffering will reveal a God who is not helping you with your pain and suffering. This may lead to unbelief or even to greater suffering.

Followers of preterism may be motivated to spirituality by these interpretations. The apocalyptic inspiration to ethical living is removed by 'preterising' the very biblical passages that are directly coupled to ethical living. Titus 2:13 has always been a central biblical passage to the theology of the second coming of Christ, where it says, "looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ". Throughout Christian history, believers and theologians have been referring to the second coming of Christ as the 'blessed hope', based on this text.¹¹⁵ Moreover, this central and biblical text of Titus 2:13 is directly linked to ethics. The previous verse declares, "...teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age" (Titus 2:12). Not unsurprisingly, preterism has even 'preterised' this central scriptural passage to the second coming. Commenting on this biblical text, DeMar (1999:225) declares that it "is neither a distant event nor the bodily return of Christ." His final conclusion about Titus 2:13 is that "[t]he blessed hope, therefore, is the coming of the fullness of the gospel in the 'glory of Christ'. This fullness was accomplished with the obliteration of the symbols of the Old Covenant: the temple, the priesthood and sacrificial system" (DeMar, 1999:226).

Voiding biblical apocalyptic from the blessed hope is destroying it of its remarkably high ethic and ethical standard.

With reference to section 3.2.6, it is clear that the eschatology of preterism is limited to less than 3 chapters of the Apocalypse, and even this meager eschatology is far removed from reality. For instance, Chilton (2006:56) suggests that it is still "thousands of years to go before the End. We are still in the early Church." With its eschatology so far removed

¹¹⁵ In line with this orthodoxy, Migliore (2004), in his book on systematic theology, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, calls his chapter on eschatology 'Christian Hope'. He contends that the eschatological symbols of Christian hope, namely the coming of Christ in glory, "are both spiritually and ethically profound" (Migliore, 2004:348). For Migliore (2004:348), it is regrettable that the church has largely lost the link between Christian hope and Christian ethics.

to the remote future and the rest of the apocalypse so far removed to the distant past, what eschatological relevance can it hold for our present? None. There is no apocalyptic prophecy to apply to our present or immediate future. This is the principal challenge with preterism. Gulley's (1998:66) observation that "John wrote the book for his time, and it has no relevance for subsequent history or end events" prompts questions regarding the relevance of the Apocalypse. As Mathews (2012:85) rightly asks, "What is the use of studying a book that applies only to seven literal churches and has nothing to say about last-day events?" We could add ... and about our present?

Preterists could defend their practical relevance in that they are busy establishing God's kingdom on earth by making "disciples of all nations" (Newton, 2012:99) and partaking of this "grand project of God" (Newton, 2012:99), so that in the present the kingdom is growing "until all the nations of the world have been disciplined" (Newton, 2012:81). However, such notions or hopes are flawed and provide no eschatological relevance to the believer in the present or the near future. Christians should not see themselves as "builders of the kingdom of God on earth" (Migliore, 2004:350). We cannot be, recreate, imitate or supplant God's coming reign and kingdom. Migliore (2004:350) makes it clear that "[u]nderstanding the relationship of Christian hope and Christian ethics in this way is as distant from the scriptural witness as it is the opposite view," which is "a purely otherworldly hope that no longer has any interest in this world and the possibilities of its transformation." These are true extremes that trap some Christians, enthused by God's hope to portray his reign to the world. Some succumb to the extreme of thinking they can establish God's reign and kingdom in this world themselves, which is the very pitfall of preterism, while others are overcome by the extremity of believing they belong to God's otherworldly kingdom and have no responsibility towards and in this world.

"In contrast to both of these views, Christian hope encourages the search for and support of positive 'indications', 'intimations', or 'parables' of the coming reign of God," says Migliore (2004:350). Christians filled with true hope will have a balanced outlook as they are in "anticipation of God's future in history" and will be motivated to prepare the way for God's coming reign by speaking, praying, and working for justice for all and peace among the nations (Migliore, 2004:350).

True eschatological hope provides a unique balance between the now and the not yet, “avoiding every foolish confusion between God’s coming reign and their always meager, inadequate, and flawed efforts to prepare its way” (Migliore, 2004:352). This is the eschatological relevance that is absent within preterism.

From the analysis above it is obvious that preterism does not offer much practical relevancy.

3.4 CONCLUSION

Preterism functions as a decent scholarly hermeneutic with good theological methods and careful interpretation of apocalyptic symbolism. “[I]t takes the time of John or history seriously” (Letseli, 2009:4). This entails that there is proper historical emphasis and research within preterism as well as thorough textual study. Further to this study format is the relevance it adds to the original readers as it takes the times of the first readers seriously and appreciates how “Revelation expresses the hopes of the early Christians” (Ladd 1972:10,11).

In today’s world filled with populist movements there is no “Last Days Madness”¹¹⁶ but rather “Prophecy without Panic”¹¹⁷ as preterism champions itself to be “An Optimistic View of The Last Days”.¹¹⁸ A much needed contribution to eschatology is the fact that preterism brings calmness to a discipline that tends to excite and lead people to the extreme. This is the greatest concern with the popular dispensational futurism and in a lesser degree with historicism. People overreact with feverish excitement with certain apocalyptic interpretation, whereas preterism removes this unhealthy element out of

¹¹⁶ DeMar, G 1999, *Last Days Madness*, Amazon.com, viewed 25 March 2020, <https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0915815354/ref=dbs_a_def_rwt_bibl_vppi_i0>

¹¹⁷ Shennea, D 2015, *Prophecy Without Panic: A Brief Introduction to Partial Preterism*, Amazon.com, viewed 25 March 2020, <<https://www.amazon.com/Prophecy-Without-Panic-Introduction-Preterism-ebook/dp/B014K1P7FM>>

¹¹⁸ Stephens, MJ 2018, *How the End Times ended in AD 70: An Optimistic View of The Last Days*, Amazon.com, viewed 25 March 2020, <https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B07FFJ3KMW/ref=dbs_a_def_rwt_bibl_vppi_i0>

eschatology. The same is true about the inherent fear within certain interpretations that is totally absent within preterism.

The critical challenge with preterism though, is that this whole interpretation school is based on the presumed dating of the Apocalypse and that “[t]he entire preterist system therefore rises or falls on the early date of Revelation” (Hitchcock, 2006:469), as illustrated earlier in Figure 3.3.

Despite its imposing constructed theological reasoning, the question remains how the entire premise of preterism can be based on a foundation that may be no foundation at all. Would being based on a questionable foundation not prove that there is a 50/50 chance that preterism is not a valid interpretation school; and even more so if such a foundation is elevated to absolute authority? Winters (1989:15–16) insists, “When the interpretation depends upon the date, the interpretation can never be more certain than the date itself – if the date is wrong, then, of necessity the interpretation is wrong.” Does this not fundamentally deem preterism to be a dangerous hermeneutic,¹¹⁹ even a time-bomb that can self-destruct? As pointed out by Mathews (2012:87), preterism is invalid if Revelation was written after AD 70 or in AD 95–96. Moreover, Winters (1989:15–16) concludes that if futurists and historicists with their later dating of the Apocalypse are correct, then the preterist view of Revelation as a prophecy fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem is false and should be totally rejected.

The critical evaluation of (partial) preterism in this chapter thus led to the following conclusion:

Firstly, preterism is not sufficiently Christological, which removes the very essence and goal of prophecy.¹²⁰ Secondly, preterism is not in line with the character of apocalyptic,

¹¹⁹ Another inherent danger is the offsetting of the coming eschaton in the very distant future to transpire only after the whole world is Christianised. If a 50/50 chance exists that this system is wrong, then the eschaton can happen at any moment and surprisingly Christ will come just as the New Testament repeatedly warns. This is why Christ said, “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.” (Matthew 25:13)

¹²⁰ Is the very title of the Apocalypse not ‘The Revelation of Jesus Christ’? Also see: John 5:39, Luke 24:25–27, 44–47.

the very literature it claims to interpret.¹²¹ Thirdly, preterism is quite skilled with its prophetic image interpretation and for this should be commended. Fourthly, preterism is vulnerable on exegetical grounds. Could this be due to its lack of being Christological and apocalyptic? Lastly, preterism is not relevant or practically applicable to a Christian's life in the present as Revelation is not prophetically applicable to us or our time.¹²²

To summarise, Chapter 3 provided a detailed definition of preterism and explained the key preterist teachings. Ultimately, preterism was critically evaluated by means of the analysis model proposed in Chapter 2. The next chapter will present a critical evaluation of futurism.

¹²¹ As discussed, preterism makes the fatal mistake of applying classical prophecy principles to apocalyptic with its local view of fulfilment instead of global and sweeping. Davidson (2007, as cited in Du Preez, 2007:44) rightly states, "One of the major mistakes of many Christian interpreters in general... is the attempt to apply the principles for interpreting classical prophecy to apocalyptic prophecy, without understanding the unique characteristics of biblical apocalyptic that distinguish it from classical prophetic literature."

¹²² As "[n]o application of the text to end-time events are evident," (Mathews, 2012:87) "preterism deprives Revelation of its prophetic character" (Mathews, 2012:87). It is "locking prophetic interpretation within Bible times" (Mathews, 2012:107) and thereby "removes present-day relevance" (Letseli, 2009:4). Nor has it "relevance for subsequent history or end events" (Gulley, 1998:66). So, the pertinent question should be asked, "What is the use of studying a book that applies only to seven literal churches and has nothing to say about last-day events?" (Mathews, 2012:85).

CHAPTER 4: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF FUTURISM

This chapter explores and evaluates the futurist apocalyptic approach. It commences by defining futurism in more detail and then mapping the key futurist teachings and views. Ultimately, the validity of this apocalyptic interpretation school is evaluated in terms of the five-tier analysis model introduced in Chapter 2.

4.1 FUTURISM DEFINED

The futurist apocalyptic approach will be more clearly and extensively defined as I endeavour to answer the following question: *What is the theological reasoning behind futurism and what will be the outcome if this hermeneutic is critically analysed?*

4.1.1 Introduction

The “*futurist* approach is held by the majority of the most popular contemporary evangelical writers and Bible teachers,” and the global impact of this hermeneutic is so extensive that many Christians and virtually all non-Christians are not even aware of the existence of other approaches (Gregg, 2013:40).

Many futurists are preoccupied with the future to the extent where the Apocalypse is consumed in an ever-evading horizon. Yet, to make it relevant, many such interpreters are constantly declaring the ‘breaking news’¹²³ that the end times are upon us. To those who are saturated with this proclamation, more sensation is needed to stimulate response

¹²³ Some futurists will deny that such signs can form part of their hermeneutic. Ice (1999:21) states, “During the last few years we have seen a rash of futurists who have tried to date the rapture. I believe that that is impossible if a futurist is consistent with the principles of futurism. Why? Because, according to pretribulational futurism the date of the rapture is not linked in any way to an earthly event that can serve as a basis for date-setting. The rapture is a sign-less event.” Yet, Ice not only wrote this chapter in this book of which he is main editor, but he also included a chapter by LaHaye (Ice, 1999:184) titled ‘Twelve Reasons Why This Could be the Terminal Generation’. LaHaye’s (Ice, 1999:185–186) first three subtitles are ‘Watching for the Signs’, ‘There are more Fulfilled Signs Today than in any Previous Age’ and ‘Israel’s Regathering: The “Super Sign” of Christ’s Return’. Why does LaHaye refer to and use the signs that Christ gave in Matthew 24, even if the editor, Ice (1999:21), denies its applicability in stating that “the rapture is a sign-less event”? It is because it is intrinsically inseparable of Christ’s coming as the whole New Testament is saturated with such ‘signs of the times’ notion. Therefore most futurists, while maybe not in theory, but in practice do look at world events to determine the nearness of Christ’s coming (rapture).

and so many futurists have ventured on the ‘forbidden ground’¹²⁴ of time-setting.¹²⁵ Among these, Hal Lindsey was the most popular in the 70s and 80s. His 1970s book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, shook the Christian publishing industry and has been described as the bestselling non-fiction book of the decade (Gentry, 1999:207). More than 35 million copies were sold in 54 languages.

Lindsey (1970:53) writes that when the Jewish people “became a nation again on 14 May 1948 the ‘fig tree’ put forth its first leaves.” He then applies the biblical text of Matthew 24:34¹²⁶ which states that “this generation will not pass away”, suggesting that it refers to “the generation that would see the signs – chief among them the rebirth of Israel” (1970:54). On this premise, Lindsey (1970:54) speculates¹²⁷ that a “generation in the Bible is something like forty years,” consequently deducing that “within forty years or so of 1948, all these things could take place.”¹²⁸ Lindsey thus predicted a time for the rapture¹²⁹ and the end.¹³⁰ Gentry (1999:208) highlights that the “rapture did not occur as Lindsey said it would, based on the 1948–88 timetable” and argues that the reason why

¹²⁴ The very Founder of Christianity, Christ himself, has warned that no-one can know the time of the end (Matthew 24:42,44).

¹²⁵ Interesting to observe is that most time setters deny that they are time setting as they are aware of the above warning from Christ. But time setting is time setting, even if you deny it.

¹²⁶ The very text that is a premise to preterism.

¹²⁷ Bacchiocchi (1987:55) states how Lindsey later revised this, “In 1970 Lindsey wrote in the *Late Great Planet Earth* that “a generation in the Bible is something like forty years,” but in 1977 he said, “I don’t know how long a Biblical generation is. Perhaps somewhere between sixty and eighty years.” It is surprising how soon Lindsey forgot the forty years length of a Biblical generation – a fact that was so crucial to him in 1970 to establish that Christ will return “within forty years or so of 1948”.

¹²⁸ Gentry (1999:208) notes that “Gary Wilburn, in his review of the film version of *The Late Great Planet Earth* agrees that the 1948–88 scenario is the keystone to Lindsey’s multi-million best-seller. “The world,” as Wilburn evaluates Lindsey’s logic, “must end within one generation from the birth of the State of Israel.”

¹²⁹ This research will show how futurism sees the coming of Christ in two phases or actual comings in section 3.2.3.

¹³⁰ “The critical point in this scenario is Lindsey’s concept of the ‘generation’ of Matthew 24 (‘this generation shall not pass away until all these take place’). He defined a biblical generation as 40 years, and concluded that ‘all these things’ could take place within 40 years of the founding of Israel. Thus he predicted the return of Christ in 1988 and the rapture of the church seven years earlier.” (Clouse, RG 1999, *Recent Premillennialism: Late Great Predictions*, Christianity Today, viewed 30 April 2020, <<https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-61/recent-premillennialism-late-great-predictions.html>>

he still captured the attention and imagination of his generation was that he had set a date for the rapture. When in 1977 Lindsey was interviewed in *Christianity Today* about his time setting, he had already revised his earlier prediction, stating that he was certain that “it will take place before the year 2000.”¹³¹ To the question “But what if you’re wrong?”¹³² Lindsay responded,

Well, there’s just a split second’s difference between a hero and a bum. I didn’t ask to be a hero, but I guess I have become one in the Christian community. So I accept it. But if I’m wrong about this, I guess I’ll become a bum.¹³³

Regarding this interview, Bacchiocchi (1987:54) observes, “Lindsey hardly reflects a genuine pastoral concern for the millions whom he has misled¹³⁴ by his books.” Even in a next book, *The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon*, Lindsey (1980:8) maintained that “[t]he decade of the 1980s could very well be the last decade of history as we know it.” Fascinating is that millions of followers were not deterred by this failed prediction; rather, Lindsey’s ‘prophetic’ influence is greater than ever. In a newsletter, *News from Hal Lindsey Media Ministries* that I received in my inbox on May 23, 2020, Lindsey writes that the “war dreaded by so many generations will at last erupt on the earth.” Thereupon, Gentry writes an article on his website entitled ‘Hal Lindsey is Making Predictions – Again.’¹³⁵

With such an influential thought leader as Lindsey in the field of the futurist hermeneutic, other futurists would logically follow setting dates and creating apocalyptic hype. This is

¹³¹ Gasque, W.W. 1977. ‘Future Fact? Future Fiction?’ *Christianity Today*. April 15: 40.

¹³² Gasque, W.W. 1977. ‘Future Fact? Future Fiction?’ *Christianity Today*. April 15: 40.

¹³³ Gasque, W.W. 1977. ‘Future Fact? Future Fiction?’ *Christianity Today*. April 15: 40.

¹³⁴ Dale Moody (‘The Eschatology of Hal Lindsey’. *Review and Expositor*. Summer 1975: 278) wrote concerning this misleading time setting of Lindsey that “[i]f the ‘Great Snatch,’ as Lindsey repeatedly calls the rapture, does take place before the Tribulation and by 1981, I will beg forgiveness from Lindsey for doubting his infallibility as we meet in the air.”

¹³⁵ DeMar, G 2005, *Hal Lindsey is Making Predictions-Again*, American Vision, viewed 14 April 2020, <<https://americanvision.org/1753/hal-lindsey-making-predictionsagain/>>

exactly what happened. Over the last 5 years there has been a surge in time setting among futurist teachers and authors.

Even in 2020, futurists have interpreted the global COVID-19 crisis as an apocalyptic occurrence. Perry Stone, for example, presented a video on 7 April 2020 titled *The Shaking has Started*.¹³⁶ To add, Rodney Howard-Browne on 5 May 2020 presented *The Rapture and Tribulation*¹³⁷ on YouTube where he and his guest, Jonathan Shuttlesworth, discussed via Skype how the Church could be raptured any day as God would not allow his people to go through the tribulation. Some futurists have succumbed to the time-setting temptation during this time, ascribing April 2020¹³⁸ as the time for the rapture to take place, while others began to set a new date for the end of the world at 2027.¹³⁹

4.1.2 Broad definition

Futurism is a “school of prophetic interpretation, especially of the book of the Revelation” (Cairns, 2002:190) and, according to the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, futurism is the hermeneutical view “that eschatological prophecies are still to be fulfilled”¹⁴⁰ at “the end of the age” (Macdonald, 2016:2456). LaRondelle (2015:9) clarifies that futurists see these prophecies to be fulfilled at the end time in the “period immediately preceding and following the second coming of Christ” (Cairns, 2002:190) or, more accurately in futuristic

¹³⁶ Stone, P 2020, *The Shaking has Started*, YouTube, viewed 10 April 2020, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7s3CAMXxZM>>

¹³⁷ Howard-Browne, R 2020, *The Rapture and Tribulation*, YouTube, viewed 7 May 2020, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vWs6BJNZjLM>>

¹³⁸ Fisher, K 2020, *Dream: Passover and we are about to board the rapture train!!!*, YouTube, viewed 8 April 2020, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YleFkhoyQj4>>

McLachlan, G 2019, *Rapture at Passover*, YouTube, viewed 8 April 2020, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UsT65PQ6q6A>>

¹³⁹ Verse by Verse Ministry n.d., *Will Christ's Second Coming be in 2027?*, Verse by Verse Ministry, 9 April 2020, <<https://www.versebyverseministry.org/bible-answers/will-christs-second-coming-be-in-2027>>

Gary n.d., *Is It Possible Christ is coming Back in 2027*, Relentless Heart, viewed 9 April 2020, <<https://relentlessheart.com/bread-from-heaven-1/008-is-it-possible-christ-is-coming-back-in-2027-1>>

August2nd2027.com n.d., *August 2nd 2027 – The Day of the Lord*, August2nd2027.com, viewed 9 April 2020, <<https://www.august2nd2027.com/>>

¹⁴⁰ *Concise Oxford English dictionary*, 2004.

terms, it concerns “future events that will take place on this earth after¹⁴¹ the rapture of the believers” (Mathews, 2012:88). Michaels (1997:23) explains that futurism posits the Apocalypse as having “to do with the future of the world – not what was future to John and is now past or present to us, but what was future to John and is *still* future to us,” as “[a] futurist sees the bulk of the Revelation (from 4:1) as awaiting fulfilment” (Cairns, 2002:190). Whereas preterism is “locking prophetic interpretation within Bible times” (Mathews, 2012:107), futurism is locking prophetic interpretation into the far future. The reality of such interpretation is that it is as “if time has stood still, as if the ‘prophetic clock’ set to go off at the end of the world shut itself off right after John finished his book and is only now ready to start ticking again – after nineteen hundred years!” (Michaels, 1997:23).

Futurism, as an apocalyptic-prophetical hermeneutic, views the apocalyptic prophecies under consideration as fulfilled in the far future during the biblical end times – far removed from the original writer’s day as well as from history. Thus, futurism is projecting most of the Apocalypse “into future history” (Gulley, 2016:22). To Morris (1984:18), futurism “is merely a forecast of what will happen in the last days,” until “those days come it means little” for “all subsequent generations right up to the last,” which means that the Apocalypse “has nothing to do with the history of the world prior to the eve of the parousia” (Mounce, 1977:28). The unfair ‘advantage’ of such an interpretation is that it “can never be proven wrong, for when events in the world do not match the scenario of John’s vision, the answer is that the events John prophesied have not yet begun to happen” (Michaels, 1997:23).

Figure 4.1 below provides a schematic presentation of futurism by means of a timeline: The three elements crucial to any prophecy are the author’s day, history, and the future. The figure highlights in red where on the timeline, in terms of these elements, futurism places the fulfillment of the prophecy.

¹⁴¹ There are derivatives of futurism that see the rapture later within end events. This research will define these in a later section.

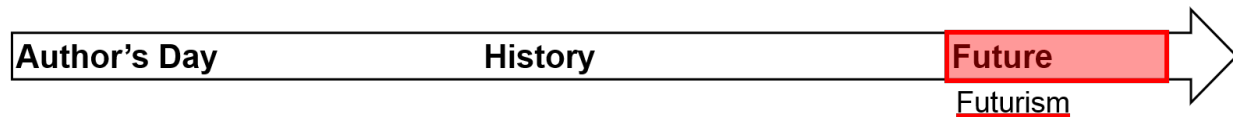


Figure 4.1 Schematic presentation of futurism

This figure clearly illustrates the view of futurism regarding the relevancy of the text to a future audience around the time of the end.

4.1.3 Dispensational pre-tribulation futurism

Beale (1999:47) identifies the unique approach of the dispensationalist view to Revelation, explaining that dispensationalist futurism sees Rev. 1:19

as the outline of the book: 'Therefore, write what you have seen' represents the past, which is described in ch. 1; 'and what is' represents the present, which is described in chs. 2–3; 'and what things are about to come to pass after these things' represents the future, which is described in 4:1–22:5.

Gregg (2013:40) determines that the “principal difference between the dispensationalist view and other *futurist* views of Revelation would be the fact that the former places the rapture of the church at Revelation 4:1, while other *futurists* would place it later (e.g., in chapter 19).” I would propose that there is much more difference, as would be seen in the next section defining moderate futurism. Dispensationalism totally removes this approach from all others, as will be seen in section 4.2. A further critical aspect to futurism is its literal approach. Cairns (2002:190) observes that while “many futurists admit the use of symbolic language in John’s apocalyptic visions, the more literally one interprets those visions, the more certainly he will be a futurist.” Gregg (2013:40) suggests that futurism in itself “frees the reader to take a more literal view of the visions,” which MacArthur (1999:10) correctly identifies as “following the same literal, grammatical-historical hermeneutical method by which non-prophetic portions of Scripture are interpreted.” This then sets dispensational pre-tribulation futurism apart from the rest as an incredibly unique hermeneutic, as will also be seen in section 4.2. This study will be evaluating dispensational pre-tribulation futurism and will mostly refer to it as futurism.

4.1.4 Moderate (or) modified futurism

According to Gregg (2013:42), not “all *futurists* are dispensationalists and not all approve of engaging in what some refer to as ‘newspaper exegesis.’ There are notable *futurist* scholars¹⁴² who reject the dispensational distinctives.” Gregg (2013:42) mentions some “more recent *futurists*” *such as* “Mounce and Ladd” who have “tempered their *futurism* with a touch of *preterism* or some other approach, taking Revelation less literally, and they refer to dispensationalism as ‘extreme.’”

Yet, Gregg (2013:42) observes that they “do, however, expect a future Antichrist to arise in a future Tribulation period to persecute the saints, and they do anticipate a literal thousand-year reign of Christ on earth.” While this is a more historical approach, Mounce (1977:28) assures that this “approach is still futurist because the central focus of the book is eschatological and belongs to the final period of history.”

To Mounce (1977:28), the advantage of this moderate approach is that it “avoids the excessive literalism that often accompanies the dispensational approach.” Also in contrast with dispensationalism which separates Israel from the church, Beale (1999:47) accounts that “this version can affirm that the church is true Israel.” This then means that there will be no “pretribulation rapture” and that “Christians will pass through the final period of trial” (Beale, 1999:47). This greatly differs from dispensational futurism which ‘guarantees’ its adherents escaping any future eschatological tribulation.

The study will not evaluate this moderate view of futurism, but as mentioned will focus on the more popular form, namely dispensational pre-tribulation futurism.

¹⁴² Gregg (2013:42) mentions, “An example would be Dr. Theodor Zahn, who, in 1929, was the foremost conservative scholar in Germany in the field of New Testament literature and exegesis.”

4.2 MAPPING FUTURIST TEACHINGS

Futurism comes in many forms, brands and branches¹⁴³. Table 4.1 below presents a few I have identified.

Table 4.1 Various forms of futurism

Futurist Premillennialism (Coming of Christ before Millennium)	Futurist Postmillennialism (Coming of Christ after Millennium)	Futurist Amillennialism (Millennium is spiritual)
Moderate Futurism	A Moderate type of Futurism	A Moderate type of Futurism
• Premillennialist	• not many proponents	• not many proponents
Dispensational Futurism		
• Pre-Tribulation Futurism		
• Mid-Tribulation Futurism		
• Post-Tribulation Futurism		
• Partial Rapture Futurism		
• Pre-Wrath Rapture Futurism		

Below is a concise summary and overview of the teachings of dispensationalist pretribulation futurists.¹⁴⁴ Please note that, while much more detail exists, only the main teachings are referred to here.

- Dispensationalism
- Literalism
- The secret rapture
- The seven-year tribulation
- The Antichrist appears
- Second Coming and the millennium
- Theocracy focus

These key teachings will now be discussed in more detail.

¹⁴³ Pfandl (2003, as cited in Du Preez, 2003:387) identifies futurism also among SDA scholars and terms it "Adventist Futurism."

¹⁴⁴ From henceforth, when futurism is referred to, it will mean dispensationalist pretribulation futurism.

4.2.1 Dispensationalism

Foundational to dispensationalist pretribulation futurism is the view that history consists of seven dispensations in which God revealed himself differently and progressively. Especially important to this hermeneutic is the distinction between Israel as God's people and the Church as God's saints.

Dispensationalist Ryrie (2007:27) asserts that dispensationalism's primary problem is the definition of the word, together with the description of the concept. Traditionally, dispensationalism relied and operated on the following principle and definition, established by Scofield (1945:5) in the *Scofield Reference Bible*: "A Dispensation is a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God. Seven such dispensations are distinguished in Scripture."

As he realises how this definition presents opportunities for criticism by non-dispensationalists, Ryrie (2007:27) contests that this is all that dispensationalism entails and chastises those dispensationalists who "use this definition without thinking further of its implications." Ryrie grasps that the essential argument against dispensationalism is its teaching that God saves and deals differently with humankind in different ages, as did the publishers of the *Scofield Reference Bible*. He therefore refers to the 2007 edition and writes that this bible now "made quite clear that dispensations are not separate ways of salvation; rather, there is only one way of salvation – 'by God's grace through the work of Christ... on the cross'" (Ryrie, 2007:27). Bloesch (2004:97), with reference to the dispensationalist belief of different ways to salvation,¹⁴⁵ declares that "at least some of them are willing to modify and correct some of the earlier assertions of the movement."

If 'one way of salvation' is then an essentiality within dispensationalism as Ryrie claims, why does Ryrie (2007:79) target dispensationalist dissenters who try to transform dispensationalism? Ryrie (2007:79) mentions those "from within the dispensational camp" who "have been promoting significant changes in normative, or traditional,

¹⁴⁵ Bloesch (2004:95) explains, "A current controversy in evangelical theology is whether the dispensations are different ways of salvation. For the later dispensationalists like Charles Ryrie there is only one way of salvation, the way of grace, but various modes of implementing this salvation."

dispensationalism.” These critical changes include, among others, the following (Ryrie, 2007:79):

- The concept of two purposes and two peoples of God (Israel and the Church) is not valid.
- Thus, the church is not a separate group of redeemed people, nor was it unrevealed in the Old Testament (just unrealised).
- There is one divine plan of holistic redemption for all people and all areas of human life.

Despite the different views of dispensational defendants, it is imperative to consider the stance of dispensational theologians. Many dispensational theologians uphold the seven dispensational model proposed by Scofield. Figure 4.2 below illustrates this model on a historical timeline.

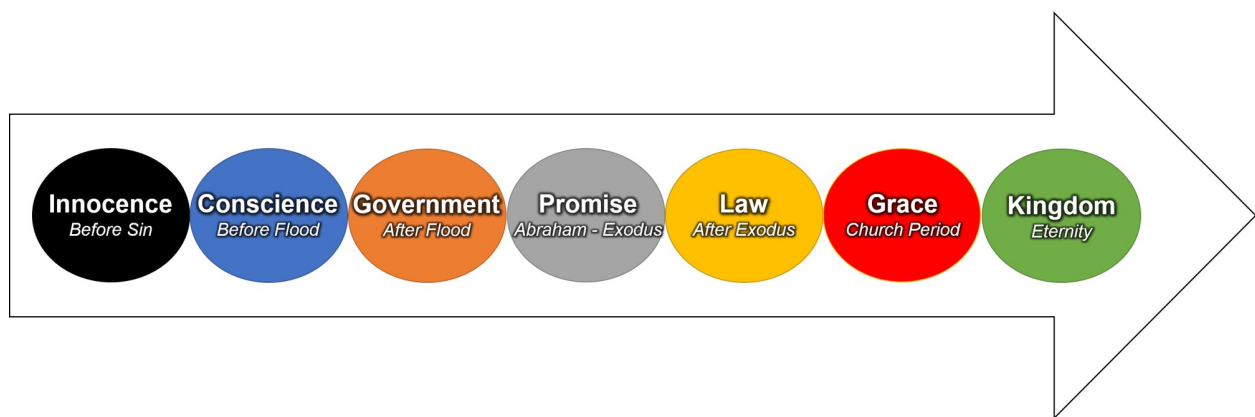


Figure 4.2 Schofield's seven dispensational model

Bloesch (2004:97) asserts, “Scofield himself as well as other early leaders perceived the dispensations as ways of salvation, and Gerstner contends that this supposition is still implicit in dispensational theology.” This is confirmed by an investigation into the theology of its proponents. Malan (2010), for instance, explains dispensationalism as follows:

There is a progressive revelation of God and His plan for the ages in human history ...Seven clear dispensations can be distinguished in the counsel of God ...Although there are certain timeless principles which remain the same in all

seven dispensations, e.g. God's righteousness and His abhorrence of sin, there are also new principles which are introduced to every new dispensation.¹⁴⁶

In Malan's dispensational model, the seven dispensations are part and parcel of "God's plan of salvation for humanity". If each dispensation is different with new 'principles' introduced, is it not advocating a different way of salvation? Therefore Bloesch (2004:97) deduces that dispensationalists' "greatest difficulty is in reconciling the testing in the various dispensations and the biblical doctrine of salvation by grace alone (*sola gratia*)."

Ryrie (2007:42) admits that the characteristics of these seven dispensations "seem to dissect history and compartmentalize its eras" and that from the viewpoint of the cross-sectional perspective of the dispensational scheme, which is the view usually presented in dispensational charts, dispensationalism does appear to do so. However, he argues that this is "not the whole story" and claims that the longitudinal or spiral perspective which also exists in dispensationalism "emphasizes the fact that God is, has been, and will be a God of grace" (Ryrie, 2007:42).

Ryrie (2007:44) further reasons, "The principal characteristic of a dispensation is the economic arrangement and responsibility that God reveals in each dispensation. Such responsibility is a test in itself. Most men fail the test, and then judgment follows." Ryrie (2007:45) maintains that what marks off a person as a dispensationalist is "the recognition of the fact that God has distinguishably different economies in governing the affairs of the world." He concludes with the three essentials or "*sine qua non*" of dispensationalism, as he terms it (Ryrie, 2007:46–48):

1. A dispensationalist keeps Israel and the Church distinct.
2. This distinction between Israel and the Church is born out of a system of hermeneutics that is usually called literal interpretation.
3. The underlying purpose of God in the world... the glory of God.

¹⁴⁶ Malan, J 2010, *The Dispensations of God – Do You Have the Correct Perspective?*, Bible Guidance, viewed 28 April 2020, <<https://www.bibleguidance.co.za/Engarticles/Dispensations.htm>>

Despite one's view on whether dispensationalism teaches a singular salvation concept or not, the key notion of dispensationalism is that Israel and the Church are totally distinct entities. The fact that both will still play a role in eschatology is the key to all the forthcoming doctrines taught by futurism.¹⁴⁷

As this distinction between Israel and the Church is seen as divine purpose, it forms the very bedrock and basis of futuristic interpretation.

4.2.2 Literalism

Critical to futurism is that prophecy, including apocalyptic prophecy, should be interpreted literally. As Ryrie (2007:47) suggests, "Consistently literal, or plain, interpretation indicates a dispensational approach to the interpretation of Scripture." Instead of providing theological reasons to substantiate literalism, Ice¹⁴⁸ defends it by simply dismissing those opposed to it, labelling everything outside literalism as "liberal" and arguing that almost everyone opposed to it is out "to demonize and marginalize the literal interpreter of Bible prophecy."¹⁴⁹

Gregg (2013:40), who believes that the futurist approach frees the reader from the difficulties of interpreting symbols, states that of "the various approaches to Revelation, the *futurist* is most likely to take a literal interpretation." Morris (1983:26) elucidates that "literalistic expositors of Revelation will be primarily futurists since practically none of the events of Revelation 4–22 have yet taken place in any literal sense." Gregg (2013:40) provides practical examples to support this: "There has never been a time in the past when a third of the sea turned to blood, killing a third of the fish and sinking a third of the ships..." Gregg further mentions that Revelation portrays "hailstones of a hundred pounds

¹⁴⁷ To highlight this notion, Ryrie (2007:46–48) quotes Chafer: "The dispensationalist believes that throughout the ages God is pursuing two distinct purposes: one related to the earth with earthly people and earthly objectives involved which is Judaism; while the other is related to heaven with heavenly people and heavenly objectives involved, which is Christianity."

¹⁴⁸ Ice, T n.d., *Literal vs. Allegorical Interpretation*, Pre-Trib Research Center, viewed 5 May 2020, <<https://www.pre-trib.org/dr-thomas-ice/message/literal-vs-allegorical-interpretation/read>>

¹⁴⁹ Ice, T n.d., *Literal vs. Allegorical Interpretation*, Pre-Trib Research Center, viewed 5 May 2020, <<https://www.pre-trib.org/dr-thomas-ice/message/literal-vs-allegorical-interpretation/read>>

weight, locusts that sting like scorpions,” and “two prophets who die in Jerusalem and rise again in three and a half days only to be publicly translated into the heavens for all to see, a mandatory mark applied to the forehead or right hand of every noncompliant citizen, etc.” According to the author, the reasonableness hereof is that if “this is to have a literal fulfillment, it must still be in the future. Other approaches must take the passage nonliterally” (Gregg, 2013:40).

Bloesch (2004:97) refers to Adventist theologian Hans K. LaRondelle who “warns against the hermeneutic of literalism that loses sight of the symbolic and poetic nature of much of the biblical language” as it “also involves a misunderstanding of biblical prophecy.” LaRondelle argues that the hermeneutic of literalism sees prophesy as a picture of “history ahead of time”, allowing “no room for greater and better things to come, things that ‘no mind has conceived’ but God alone (1 Cor 2:9; Is 64:4)” (Bloesch, 2004:97–98).

Ironically, futurism charges proponents of differing hermeneutics “with allegorizing or spiritualizing¹⁵⁰ when it comes to the interpretation of prophecy and, consequently, being inconsistent in their use of the literal interpretation of Scripture” (LaRondelle, 1983:29). LaRondelle (1983:29) quotes Ryrie who asserts that “[t]he dispensationalist claims to apply his literal principle to all Scripture, including prophecy, while the non-dispensationalist does not apply it to prophecy.” This gives rise to the question whether futurism applies its literalism consistently. LaRondelle (1983:29) points out how dispensationalism allegorises Old Testament narrative and refers to the *Scofield Reference Bible* which frequently applies figurative interpretations to Old Testament narratives.¹⁵¹ He offers the example of the eight chapters of Song of Songs where Solomon’s love follows “the analogy of the marriage relationship” to symbolise the love of

¹⁵⁰ Ice states, “Historically when people do not like what a document says or they want to make it fit their philosophical bent they allegorize that document.” (Ice, T n.d., *Literal vs. Allegorical Interpretation*, Pre-Trib Research Center, viewed 5 May 2020, <<https://www.pre-trib.org/dr-thomas-ice/message/literal-vs-allegorical-interpretation/read>>)

¹⁵¹ LaRondelle (1983:29) summarises, “The following examples are found in the New Scofield Reference Bible (1967). The whole Old Testament book Song of Solomon (or Song of Songs) has a threefold interpretation: (1) of Solomon’s love for a Shulamite girl; (2) ‘as a figurative revelation of God’s love for His covenant people, Israel, the wife of the Lord (Is 54:5–6; Jer 2:2 ...)’; (3) ‘as an allegory of Christ’s love for His heavenly bride, the Church (2 Cor 11:1–2; Eph 5:25–32)’ (p. 705; emphasis added).”

the divine Bridegroom. LaRondelle (1983:29) concludes that dispensationalism spiritualises an Old Testament historical book based on a twofold analogy, namely between the marriage covenant and God's covenant with Israel and between God's covenant with Israel and Christ's love for his Church. He then argues that this double allegorical interpretation implicates the acceptance of "a basic theological analogy between the old and the new dispensation, the old and the new covenant, the Old and New Testament," which means that they are theologically similar to one another.

LaRondelle (1983:29) further indicates that, while *The New Scofield Reference Bible* also interprets other Old Testament passages¹⁵² allegorically, paradoxically, futurism "constantly acknowledges christological and ecclesiological types and analogies in the Old Testament narratives, with an appeal to the New Testament for support" (LaRondelle, 1983:30). LaRondelle (1983:30) highlights the underlying irony in futurism in exemplifying that "dispensationalism accepts the christological-ecclesiological principle of typology and allegorizing for Old Testament interpretation, while its own dogmatic axiom declares that Israel and the Church are basically dissimilar and incongruous to each other." This irregularity is not simply an oversight, as it is employed throughout the interpretation scheme of futurism. LaRondelle (1983:30) illustrates that futurism sees the Church "merely as an interim phenomenon which was not foreseen and intended by the Old Testament." The importance of this futurist principle, namely that the Old Testament did not foresee the Church, should not be overlooked as it is critical to the development of the futurist doctrines. It is, for instance, a critical element in one of the main illustrations of Clarence Larkin (1918:5–6) in his book *Dispensational Truth*. See the author's in-depth illustrations of the futurist doctrine in Figure 4.3 below.

¹⁵² LaRondelle (1983:29,30) gives examples of some Old Testament passages: "The scarlet line which Rahab bound in the window of her home at Jericho (Joshua 2:21) is applied allegorically because of its red color of 'safety through sacrifice (Heb 9:19–22)' (p. 261). Most interpreters reject this allegorism as an illegitimate spiritualizing. The passage of Israel through the Jordan River (in Joshua 3) is said to be 'a figure of our death with Christ (Rom 6:3–4, 6–11)' (p. 261).

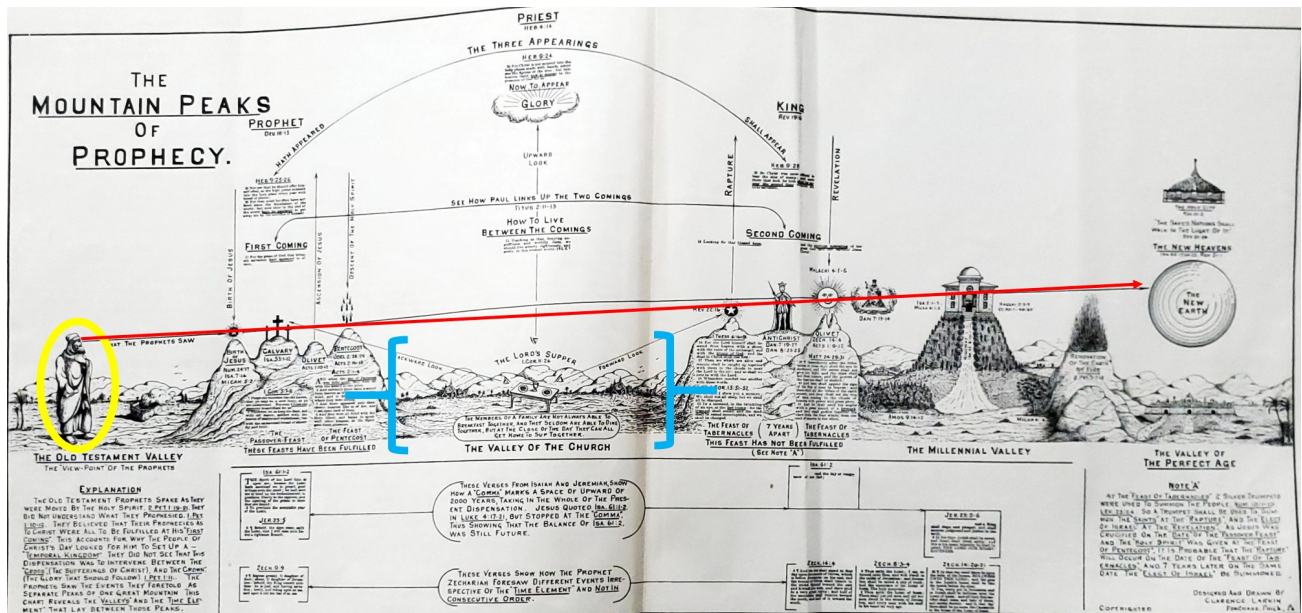


Figure 4.3 Larkin's illustration of the futurist doctrine

Source: Larkin (1918:5–6)

Please note how the Old Testament prophets (in yellow) foresaw the future (in red) but totally looked over the “Church Age” (in blue) as it was hidden from their view, here illustrated as being in a valley. This is done to give the apocalyptic prophecies the potential fulfillment in Israel and not the Church, as this was seemingly God’s original plan in the Old Testament. Allis (1969:50) portrays the futurist view by stating that the present age of preaching the gospel of the grace of God to all mankind should be regarded as “a merely temporal interruption in the Old Testament program for the glorification of Israel.” Yet, the fact that the Church was foreshadowed in the Old Testament remains to be explained by futurism.

LaRondelle (1983:30) discloses that futurism tries to harmonise this inconsistency by compartmentalising Scripture into two sections, namely the history of Israel and the prophecy of Israel. They argue that the former must be interpreted “typologically and allegorically in view of Christ and the Church”, while the latter must be interpreted “exclusively by a literalism which refuses to recognize any type or figure of the Church” (LaRondelle, 1983:30). The author argues that “[w]hile dispensationalists boast of their

literalism, they prove to be inconsistent” (LaRondelle, 1983:30). Erratically, futurism functions in its own exclusive hermeneutical paradigm where it “operates with two basically different canons of interpreting the Old Testament” (LaRondelle, 1983:30). The first principle is “the christological-ecclesiological principle on the basis of New Testament authority for the historical part”, whereas the second is “the principle of literalism for the prophetic parts, which fundamentally denies the christological-ecclesiological fulfillment” (LaRondelle, 1983:31).

The issue remains that futurism is inconsistent in its very floorwork of interpretation in its proposed literalism. LaRondelle (1983:31) refers to futurism’s “unique view of the revelation and inspiration of Israel’s prophecy: ‘prophecy is prewritten history’, or, in the words of C. I. Scofield, ‘Historical Scriptures have an allegorical or spiritual significance ... [In prophetic Scriptures] we reach the ground of absolute literalness.’”

This acknowledgement that dispensationalism does not apply the principle of literalism consistently “to all Scripture” but limits it to prophecy (LaRondelle, 1983:31) should be questioned. Consequently, LaRondelle (1983:31) asks bluntly, “What is the justification for this switch to absolute literalness in the realm of fulfillment of each prophetic word in the Old Testament? Is this use of a double hermeneutic taught in the New Testament?”

Theologically we know that this double hermeneutic is not to be found in the New Testament. LaRondelle (1983:31) therefore aptly, in crisp detail, expounds the critical flaw inherent in the futurist notion of literalism as that it accepts an “organic relationship between the Old Testament history of Israel (persons, redemptive events, etc., as types of the Church) and the Church of Christ, yet rejects this organic relationship between Israel’s prophecy and the Church.”

If the very floorwork of futurism is flawed, can one expect more of its forthflowing doctrines?

4.2.3 The secret rapture

With the foundational premise of dispensationalism and the critical floorwork of literalism, the main (and best known) pillar of futurism is that of the secret rapture. Proponents rely on the secret rapture to change the world in all facets to bring about end events. LaHaye (1973:111) maintains that the rapture will “leave an unprecedented vacancy and cause the most chaotic and disruptive consequences that have ever been created by a single event.” There are mainly five central parts to the secret rapture, namely two comings, a secret coming, the resurrection of Christians, the Church raptured, and the judgment of Christians. These will be discussed in more detail below.

(i) Two comings

Hitchcock (2012:136) denies that futurism “teaches two ‘second comings’ of Christ”. He (2012:136) argues that “the Second Coming is a single event in two phases, which occur at least seven years apart, on either end of the Tribulation.” In addition, Stanton (1991:20) transcribes this apparent difficulty as quite reasonable, stating that “[p]retribulationists do not believe that there are two second comings, ...but that there is one coming incorporating two separate movements...” Erickson (2013:1093) shows how “[t]hese stages” of “the rapture and the revelation” are viewed as “the ‘coming for’ the saints and the ‘coming with’ the saints.” Utilising this futurist terminology, the question remains how it could be one coming when the coming depicts Christ coming without the saints and the other with the saints. Judged by their own terminology, are these not two different events? Erickson (2013:1093) explains how these “two events will be separated by the great tribulation, believed to be approximately seven years in duration.” Logically speaking, it is difficult to see one event when there is a time span of seven years between such events. The first event, which futurists term ‘the rapture’ or ‘coming for’ will be secret and will not be noticed by anyone except the Church (Erickson, 2013:1093). This supposedly secret rapture is exclusively for the Church whereby the faithful in the church will be raptured to heaven for a period of seven years. “Because it is to precede the tribulation, no prophecy must yet be fulfilled before it can take place” (Erickson, 2013:1093). According to this hermeneutic, the next event on God’s prophetic clock is the secret

rapture. Erickson (2013:1093) logically deduces that “[c]onsequently, the rapture could occur at any moment, or, in the usual terminology, it is imminent.” At the end of this seven year period, “the Lord will return again, bringing his church with him in a great triumphant arrival” which will be the climactic second coming, “a conspicuous, glorious, universally recognized event” after which Christ “will then set up his earthly millennial kingdom” (Erickson, 2013:1093). LaHaye’s (1999:100) illustration of this Second Coming in its two phases is presented in Figure 4.4 below.

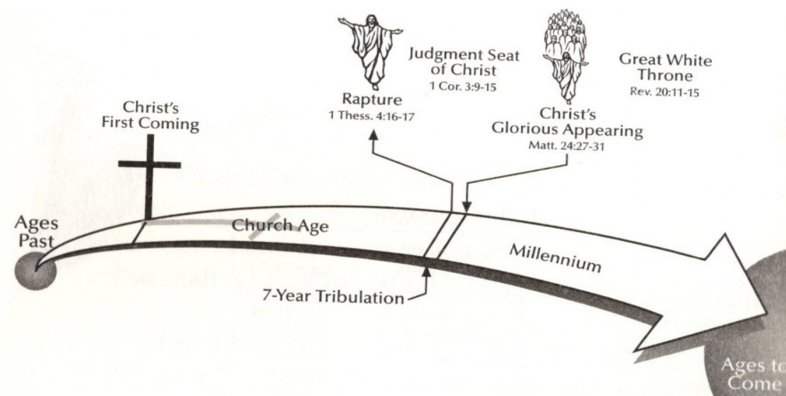


Figure 4.4 The Second Coming of Christ in two phases

Source: LaHaye (1999:100)

Erickson (2013:1093) attributes this seemingly futuristic challenge to the vocabulary used to indicate the second advent. He writes that in the New Testament the “three major terms for the second coming are παρουσία, ἀποκάλυψις, and ἐπιφάνεια” (Erickson, 2013:1093). Traditionally within futurism it was understood that the παρουσία (*parousia*) referred to the secret rapture whereas ἀποκάλυψις (*apokalupsis*), and ἐπιφάνεια (*epiphaneia*) referred to the second coming. It seems that the use of the three *advent* Greek terms within futurism has drastically changed since people like Erickson have pointed out the obvious. Today, futurists more carefully argue that all three words refer to the rapture or second coming interchangeably. But such reasoning has become intensely complex while Scripture’s reading is relatively simple on the subject. Payne (2011:47) maintains that “a single Greek name seems to require a single event, unless strong proof is offered to the

contrary.” Therefore, he argues that when *parousia* is used for two events seven years apart, it suggests two separate comings.

In the context of this complex reasoning, Whitlock defends the two ‘second comings’ objections to pretribulationism in his doctoral thesis, *The Coming Of The Lord As An Extended Unified Complex Of Events*. His (2015:300) conclusion is that “viewing the coming of the Lord as an extended unified complex of events provides a reasonable response to the criticism that a pretribulation rapture requires two “second comings” of the Lord.” Yet, Hoekema (1994:165) confirms that “[n]o argument for the two-stage coming can be derived from the use of the New Testament words for the Second Coming.”

Be that as it may, no matter the argument, the futurist would just maintain that the second coming in all these verses is only one event, but in two phases. This is quite convenient, and yet, ironically, invalidating in itself, as each futurist interpreter tries to group different New Testament passages into the two categories, namely the rapture and the second coming. This very action shows that futurism indeed portrays two comings of Christ.

In an endeavour to uphold the futurist argument, LaHaye (1999:98) states, “There are far too many conflicting activities connected with His return to be merged into a single coming.” Note how he admits it cannot be a single coming but two. In contrast with almost all biblical scholars through the ages who have taught a singular coming of Christ and never had any incoherency between texts, LaHaye (1999:98) suggests that there is no harmony between all the second coming passages in Scripture and the only way it can harmonise is by making it two.

Table 4.2 below shows how LaHaye (1999:99) lists these passages into two categories.

Table 4.2 LaHaye's categories of second coming passages

Rapture Passages		
John 14:1-3	1 Thessalonians 1:10	Hebrews 9:28
Romans 8:19	1 Thessalonians 2:19	James 5:7-9
1 Corinthians 1:7-8	1 Thessalonians 4:13-18	1 Peter 1:7, 13
1 Corinthians 15:51-53	1 Thessalonians 5:9, 23	1 Peter 5:4
1 Corinthians 16:22	2 Thessalonians 2:1	1 John 2:28-3:2
Philippians 3:20-21	1 Timothy 6:14	Jude 1:21
Philippians 4:5	2 Timothy 4:1, 8	Revelation 2:25
Colossians 3:4	Titus 2:13	Revelation 3:10
Second Coming Passages		
Daniel 2:44-45	Mark 13:14-27	1 Peter 4:12-13
Daniel 7:9-14	Mark 14:62	2 Peter 3:1-14
Daniel 12:1-3	Luke 21:25-28	Jude 1:14-15
Zechariah 12:10	Acts 1:9-11	Revelation 1:7
Zechariah 14:1-15	Acts 3:19-21	Revelation 19:11-20:6
Matthew 13:41	1 Thessalonians 3:13	Revelation 22:7, 12, 20
Matthew 24:15-31	2 Thessalonians 1:6-10	
Matthew 26:64	2 Thessalonians 2:8	

Source: LaHaye (1999:99)

The central verse for the rapture teaching is that of 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, also listed above. According to Hitchcock (2012:173), this passage describes the rapture, with Paul writing in the context of the believers who “are grieving because they fear that their loved ones have missed the Resurrection and the Rapture.” If this passage is referring to the rapture, where only Christians will be resurrected, it offers consolation to the believers in Thessalonica that “I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Certainly, in this letter Paul also includes the newly baptised Christians in Thessalonica¹⁵³ who previously had been devoted Jews, as he clearly is not excluding them but consoles them that their beloved and devout Jewish parents and grandparents who had died with the hope and expectancy in the Messiah will be resurrected, and they who are alive will not precede them in Christ’s coming, “For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those

¹⁵³ Acts 17:1–9 indicates how some of the devout Jews became Christians. One of them was the famous Jason of Thessalonica.

who are asleep” (1 Thessalonians 4:15). How can this passage then denote a rapture and resurrection of only Christians?

Moreover, LaHaye’s categorisation of second coming passages, illustrated in Table 4.2 above, clearly indicates that futurism teaches two second comings of Christ, regardless of its claim of one coming in two phases. A great number of other futurist proponents categorise these biblical passages accordingly, with many copying from one another. Hitchcock (2012:150–151), for instance, presents a list identical to that of LaHaye with only the omission of Revelation 2:25 in the rapture category.

Furthermore, Chafer (1976:288), a spiritual forefather to dispensational pretribulationism, as the founder of Dallas Theological Seminary where leading futurists like Hal Lindsey studied, emphatically states that the terms often used in connection with the second coming, such as ‘two phases’, ‘two aspects’ or ‘two parts of His coming’ are misleading. Chafer (1976:288) contends that there are two comings of Christ at the end where “in the first event the movement is upward from earth to heaven” and hereafter “in the second advent the movement is downward from heaven to earth.” Therefore, Chafer (1976:288) concludes that it is impossible for the first event to be a part of the second event. How could it be, if so essentially different and divided by a space of seven years?

This is why Ladd (1990:70) affirms that the vocabulary used does not support the idea of “two comings or of two aspects of His coming.” He argues that it rather “substantiates the view that the return of Christ will be a single, indivisible glorious event.”

(ii) A secret coming

As mentioned, the central scriptural passage utilised to argue for a secret rapture is that of 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. LaHaye’s (1973:76) view that it is the “main Bible passage on the Rapture of the Church” also reflects that of pretribulation rapture proponents, all of whom quote this passage in explaining the secret rapture. But oddly, verse 16 contains words (highlighted in the extract below) that portray everything but secrecy:

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with **a shout**, with **the voice** of an archangel, and with **the trumpet** of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

Hence, the challenge of finding a secret coming of Christ in this passage is evident, as also indicated by Ladd (1990:63). The issue remains how futurists see this passage as denoting a secret coming. LaHaye (1973:76) explains that the expression 'caught up' is a translation of the Greek word which literally means 'to seize as a robber seizes a prize'. He is referring to ἀρπάζω which means 'take away' or 'seize'. Obviously, context must be considered when translating the word and here the context clearly indicates the opposite of secrecy. However, LaHaye (1973:76) concludes, "[W]e have as the meaning of rapture that one day Christ is coming to rob the world of His jewels (that is, His redeemed ones) to take them into heaven with Him." Thus, Christ is denoted as a thief. This 'thief' notion will be analysed in the pages to follow. It will be shown how it is repudiated even by futurists.

With the secret rapture being a central pillar of futurism, the question could be posed why this rapture is deemed a secret coming. In order to grasp the futurist answer to this question, one needs to understand the underlying reasoning concerning the coming of Christ as there is no implicit biblical injunction regarding this. Launching the typical futuristic reasoning, LaHaye (1999:103–104) argues that the coming of Christ is for two different groups of people and fulfills two different purposes and therefore **must** happen in two phases. The very foundation of the futurist reasoning why the rapture can be deemed secret is that this hermeneutic dissects all biblical data concerning the eschaton into two. Conveniently, all those passages that clearly indicate a visible, glorious and majestic coming are separated from that which only reflects Christ coming for his saints. The result is a rapture that can be portrayed as secret as all verses which reflect otherwise are viewed as referring to the final glorious coming of Christ.

LaHaye (1999:104) builds his argument on this premise, proposing that the first phase of Christ's coming "is the Rapture, when all living and dead Christians will be snatched up to be with Christ in the Father's house. The second is for all the people of the world, who will be judged for rejecting Christ." LaHaye (1999:104) thus bases the secrecy of the rapture on the proposition of the two comings of Christ, explaining as follows: "The first is secret, for a special group; the second is public, for everyone left on the earth. They are entirely distinct events!" As this brand of futurism is forthflowing from dispensationalism,

there is a clear demarcation between Christians and the rest, where Christians are treated differently. Further to this logic, LaHaye concludes that since Christians are in the inner circle of Christ, when they will be removed from this world it will be in secret. This will contrast with the glorious coming of Christ after the seven-year tribulation when he comes for the public.

Futurists will argue that a biblical directive can be found in some biblical concepts for a rapture that is secret, such as 'a thief in the night' and 'left behind'. These two concepts will therefore be explored below.

A Thief in the Night

In 1973, film director Donald W. Thompson released his career best film, *A Thief in the Night*, that depicts a young woman, Patty, "living for the moment with little concern for the future. Until she awakens one morning to find her husband and millions of other people have mysteriously vanished."¹⁵⁴ This film portrays the futuristic notion of the rapture and its consequences in people's lives. The title of the film is taken from Scripture and applied to the rapture, indicating that Christ will secretly snatch Christians away from this world, leaving countless in anguish during the tribulation. Dean Anderson describes this thriller as "a film that wreaked havoc on the sleep of millions of souls in America and around the world."¹⁵⁵ John Walliss, who has written extensively on the movie and its aftermath, asserts, "Just as Alfred North Whitehead said that all of philosophy is a footnote to Plato, so we might say that all of evangelical Christian film is a footnote to *A Thief in the Night*."¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Thompson, DW 1973, *A Thief in the Night*, Amazon Prime, viewed 15 May 2020, <<https://www.amazon.com/Thief-Night-Patty-Dunning/dp/B06VW92HMF>>

¹⁵⁵ Anderson, DA 2012, *The Original 'Left Behind'*, Christianity Today, viewed 15 May 2020, <<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2012/marchweb-only/originalleftbehind.html>>

¹⁵⁶ Frykholm, A 2012, *The End Is Always with Us: The 40th Anniversary of "A Thief in the Night"*, Religion and Politics, viewed 15 May 2020, <<https://religionandpolitics.org/2012/11/09/the-end-is-always-with-us-the-40th-anniversary-of-a-thief-in-the-night/>>

The title of this film comes from the biblical passage in 1 Thessalonians 5:2¹⁵⁷ which states, “For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.” As discussed earlier, this passage has been identified for years among futurists as referring to the secret rapture. More than a century ago, Bishop (1910:341) wrote, “It will be a secret rapture – quiet, noiseless, sudden as the step of the thief in the night. All that the world will know will be that multitudes at once have gone.” Note how Bishop equates the rapture with that of the biblical notion of thief as ‘quiet’, ‘noiseless’, ‘sudden’ – meaning secret. During the same time period, Silver (1914:260) writes, “Quickly and invisibly, unperceived by the world, the Lord will come as a thief in the night and catch away His waiting saints.” Hence, in harmony with Bishop, Silver sees the rapture as secret for it takes place ‘quickly’, ‘invisibly’, ‘unperceived’. For many years, this ‘thief’ notion had been a main pillar among futurists, preached and taught for almost a century by the well-known Oral Roberts and inbred within the theological principles of the influential university he founded, named after himself, the *Oral Roberts University*.¹⁵⁸ In correspondence to the ‘thief’ notion, Roberts (1967:34) wrote that Christ’s “appearance in the clouds will be veiled to the human eye and no one will see Him. He will slip in, slip out; move in to get His jewels and slip out as under the cover of night,” thus denoting that Christ will come as a thief to steal away his Christian children without anyone witnessing it. The question is whether this is what Paul intends when he writes in 1 Thessalonians 5:2–4:

For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.

In the wake of interpreters like Roberts and film directors like Thompson, Peth (1988:508) quotes the above passage from where this ‘thief’ notion is taken and states that the “[r]ules

¹⁵⁷ This immediately follows 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, which further helped the argument of futurists that the thief coming in 1 Thessalonians 5:2 refers to the secret rapture.

¹⁵⁸ Oral Roberts University n.d., *Homepage*, Oral Roberts University, viewed 16 April 2020, <<https://oru.edu>>

of elementary grammar dictate that the subject of the sentence is ‘day’, not ‘Lord’. And the words ‘of the Lord’ are simply a prepositional phrase used to identify which ‘day’ is meant.” Explaining this in even more simple terms, Peth (1988:508) clarifies that it is “not the Lord who comes as a thief – it’s a **day** of the Lord, the **time** of His Return, that sneaks up and surprises...” This then means that Paul is “discussing here not the **manner** but the **time** of Christ’s Return,” or in other words, Paul is dealing with “**when** Christ will return, not **how**” (Peth, 1988:508). Moreover, this passage cannot depict any secret rapture as it denotes a ‘sudden destruction’ on those overtaken by Christ’s coming.

Peter echoes this destruction as global and also pertaining to the very earth and cosmos in 2 Peter 3:10.

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

Commenting on this passage, Peth (1988:508) observes, “Peter agrees with Paul in saying that it’s the **day** of the Lord which comes as unexpectedly as a thief to most people.” According to Peth (1988:508), the text indicates that this coming of Christ “will be anything but secret,” as “Peter’s text eloquently disproves the quietness of the thief concept” (Peth, 1988:508).

Futurists have noticed how their arguments have been systematically disproved by the simple reading of the text (as seen above) and thus, in recent years, there has been a moving away from this ‘thief’ notion altogether. Thomas Ice, for instance, explains how about half a century ago movies like *A Thief in the Night* “taught the pre-trib rapture and was also a catalyst that saw many people come to Christ through its showing as Christ coming as a thief in the night.”¹⁵⁹ Ice also relays that from the influence of the ‘Jesus rock’ music which surfaced in America in 1969, with its main message that Christ was coming soon, therefore you had better trust him as Saviour so as not to miss the rapture. Song

¹⁵⁹ Ice, T n.d., *A Thief in the Night*, Pre-Trib Research Center, viewed 16 May 2020, <<https://www.pre-trib.org/dr-thomas-ice/message/a-thief-in-the-night/read>>

titles included “I Wish We’d All Been Ready” and “Right Here in America”. The latter spoke about the persecution of Christians that was about to transpire in America.

In this context, where even movies and songs portray Christ’s coming at the rapture as ‘a thief in the night’,¹⁶⁰ Ice questions whether the rapture is ever directly associated with the ‘thief in the night’ motif.¹⁶¹ He then indicates that the ‘thief’ image is used seven times in relation to a coming of Christ, and only in the New Testament: Matt. 24:43; Lk. 12:39; 1 Thess. 5:2, 4; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 3:3 and 16:15.¹⁶²

His conclusion after a further, proper study¹⁶³ of each biblical passage portraying this ‘thief’ notion is that this imagery never applies to the rapture.¹⁶⁴ Contrary to the long-standing view of futurists, Ice declares, “Christ will not steal anything away at the rapture. He is coming for His Bride – the Church, the Body of Christ.”¹⁶⁵ A similar, drastic shifting away from this ‘thief’ notion among many futurists¹⁶⁶ has occurred in recent years, where no recent works are in any instance referring to the ‘thief’ notion when the rapture is explained.

¹⁶⁰ Ice, T n.d., *A Thief in the Night*, Pre-Trib Research Center, viewed 16 May 2020, <<https://www.pre-trib.org/dr-thomas-ice/message/a-thief-in-the-night/read>>

¹⁶¹ Ice, T n.d., *A Thief in the Night*, Pre-Trib Research Center, viewed 16 May 2020, <<https://www.pre-trib.org/dr-thomas-ice/message/a-thief-in-the-night/read>>

¹⁶² Ice, T n.d., *A Thief in the Night*, Pre-Trib Research Center, viewed 16 May 2020, <<https://www.pre-trib.org/dr-thomas-ice/message/a-thief-in-the-night/read>>

¹⁶³ Ice states, “Even though there are other issues of greater importance than viewing the rapture event as a thief in the night, I believe it is important that we properly handle the Word of God (2 Tim. 2:15) and relate biblical phrases and descriptions in the same way the Bible does. It could be that when we misapply biblical imagery, we not only create false associations, but we could also miss the application of a motif the Bible actually teaches. This could be the case with the thief in the night language.” (Ice, T n.d., *A Thief in the Night*, Pre-Trib Research Center, viewed 16 May 2020, <<https://www.pre-trib.org/dr-thomas-ice/message/a-thief-in-the-night/read>>)

¹⁶⁴ Ice, T n.d., *A Thief in the Night*, Pre-Trib Research Center, viewed 16 May 2020, <<https://www.pre-trib.org/dr-thomas-ice/message/a-thief-in-the-night/read>>

¹⁶⁵ Ice, T n.d., *A Thief in the Night*, Pre-Trib Research Center, viewed 16 May 2020, <<https://www.pre-trib.org/dr-thomas-ice/message/a-thief-in-the-night/read>>

¹⁶⁶ Yet, a large percentage still teach this as core to their futurist paradigm.

Left Behind

If the central concept which proves the secret rapture, namely that Christ is coming as a 'thief' is no longer at play, the issue at hand is how futurists still biblically argue such a notion. Anderson, for instance, still assumes the rapture of believers, based on his view that the film *A Thief in the Night* depicts that "one will be taken and one will be left."¹⁶⁷

Furthermore, the rapture as secret coming has been inferred by futurists from Christ's words in Luke 17:34–36:

I tell you, in that night there will be two men in one bed: the one will be taken and the other will be left. Two women will be grinding together: the one will be taken and the other left. Two men will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left.

This passage has served to prove that the rapture will happen so suddenly that it cannot be other than secret. John Dart, former news editor of the *Christian Century* magazine,¹⁶⁸ remarks that LaHaye and Jenkins's *Left Behind* fiction series obtains its title from passages like Luke 17 where Jesus describes the end times.¹⁶⁹ Without this passage, it is highly doubtful that rapture proponents would uphold that it is secret in the absence of the 'thief' notion; moreover, whether the authors would use this title for their series. Dart expounds, "Left Behind fans and others influenced by dispensationalist theology tend to see the ones taken as 'raptured' heavenward to be with the Lord."¹⁷⁰ Subsequently, he proposes that this is inconsistent with New Testament scholars and uses Ben Witherington's argument to substantiate this. Witherington argues that to a first-century audience, Luke 17:35 would mean that one will be taken away for judgment, with the

¹⁶⁷ Anderson, DA 2012, *The Original 'Left Behind'*, Christianity Today, viewed 15 May 2020, <<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2012/marchweb-only/originalleftbehind.html>>

¹⁶⁸ Christian Century n.d., *Homepage*, Christian Century, viewed 17 May 2020 <<https://www.christiancentury.org>>

¹⁶⁹ Dart, J 2002, *Left Behind*, Religion Online, viewed 17 May 2020, <<http://www.religion-online.org/article/left-behind/>>

¹⁷⁰ Dart, J 2002, *Left Behind*, Religion Online, viewed 17 May 2020, <<http://www.religion-online.org/article/left-behind/>>

“other one remaining where she is.” The author maintains that in Jewish literature, everyone is expected to face the coming judgment. Furthermore, he informs that during that era, the phrase ‘taken away for judgment’ frequently appeared in both Jewish and Greco-Roman literature and he “interprets the term ‘taken’ in this context ‘of the long history of Israel’s being taken away into exile, and individuals being taken away for trial and judgment, including Jesus.’”¹⁷¹

However, Hart posits that the converse passage of Luke 17:34–36 in Matthew 24:26–44 applies to the secret rapture; yet, in his introduction he admittedly states that “since the ‘coming’ of Jesus in verses 29–31 is mentioned just five verses before the ‘coming’ of Jesus discussed in verses 36–44, pretribulationists have felt compelled by context to reject a rapture in verses 36–44.”¹⁷² Still, endeavouring to prove the contrary, as in keeping with the traditional view of futurists, Hart asserts,

If the rapture is being taught in verses 36–44, the fundamental challenge is to demonstrate contextually how verses 29–31 can refer to the posttribulational second coming of Christ, while 24:36–44 can depict the pretribulational rapture of the church.¹⁷³

After arguing 9 reasons, Hart concludes, “It is the contention of this study that pretribulationists can exegetically and theologically interpret the pretribulation rapture in Matthew 24:36–44.”¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ Dart, J 2002, *Left Behind*, Religion Online, viewed 17 May 2020, <<http://www.religion-online.org/article/left-behind/>>

¹⁷² Hart, J n.d., *A Defense of the Rapture in the Olivet Discourse*, Pre-Trib Research Center, viewed 18 May 2020, <<https://www.pre-trib.org/dr-thomas-ice/message/a-defense-of-the-rapture-in-the-olivet-discourse/read>>

¹⁷³ Hart, J n.d., *A Defense of the Rapture in the Olivet Discourse*, Pre-Trib Research Center, viewed 18 May 2020, <<https://www.pre-trib.org/dr-thomas-ice/message/a-defense-of-the-rapture-in-the-olivet-discourse/read>>

¹⁷⁴ Hart, J n.d., *A Defense of the Rapture in the Olivet Discourse*, Pre-Trib Research Center, viewed 18 May 2020, <<https://www.pre-trib.org/dr-thomas-ice/message/a-defense-of-the-rapture-in-the-olivet-discourse/read>>

Even so, the issue remains whether Christ himself did not clarify who those are who will be 'left behind' in Luke 17:34–36. The greater context is Christ's glorious second coming, as portrayed from verse 22 to 30, which will be visible to all like "lightning that flashes". Christ equates his coming with the flood in Noah's day that "came and destroyed them all" with only Noah and his family left behind alive. Further, Christ compares his coming with the fire in Lot's day which "destroyed them all", with only Lot and his daughters left behind alive. Then Christ states in verse 30, "Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed." (Luke 17:13) Within this context, Christ pronounces, "Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it." (Luke 17:33) Subsequently, in Luke 17:34–36 Christ proposes that there will only be two groups at his coming, those who will lose their lives and those whose lives will be preserved:

I tell you, in that night there will be two men in one bed: the one will be taken and the other will be left. Two women will be grinding together: the one will be taken and the other left. Two men will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left.

Clearly, three parties of two each will be at different locations. One of the two at each location will be 'taken' and the other 'left'. It is clearly indicated that in each case, one will be 'left' at the current location. Logically, the listeners, his disciples, would wonder where the others will be 'taken'. Luke 17:37 reads:

And they answered and said to Him, "Where, Lord?" So He said to them, "Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together."

Christ thus answers that they are 'taken' to death and thereby tying it directly to his previous examples of the flood in Noah's day and the fire in Lot's day that 'destroyed' those 'taken' and 'left' the rest alive. Yet, in contrast to this clear statement, many futurists uphold that those who are 'taken' will enter heaven by means of the rapture and those who are 'left behind' will have to go through the tribulation. How can such a viewpoint be upheld in the face of such comprehensible scripture?

This has given rise to the growing divide among futurists. Robert Dean recognises two broad categories in the futurist dispensational views of Matt 24:31–25:46, namely those who believe that Matt 24:36 introduces the rapture of the Church and those who see the entire context as relating only to the Second Coming of Christ.¹⁷⁵ Evidently, as futurists are honestly exegeting the text, they must admit that the contents is fitting the narrative of the glorious coming of Christ.

The question could then be asked if there is any scriptural basis left to declare the rapture still secret.

(iii) The resurrection of Christians

With the secret rapture, all Christians who had died with their faith in Christ will be resurrected and will be ‘snatched’ away in the ‘twinkling of an eye’, together with those faithful Christians who are still alive.

The central New Testament message of the Second Coming is that if you are not ready for it, you will be lost. However, according to the futurist approach, if you were not ready for the rapture, you can still be saved but would probably have to die in the tribulation¹⁷⁶ and can then be resurrected at the second coming. Hitchcock (2012:206) supports this, stating that those who missed the rapture but “who trust Christ during the Tribulation and are martyred will be resurrected and rewarded at the end of the Tribulation.” LaHaye (1999:240) even proposes that there will be a third chance during the millennium where “the unregenerate will be given one hundred years to repent.” Still, the Bible does not give any indication of a second (or third) chance when it comes to the Second Coming, not

¹⁷⁵ Dean, R n.d., *Mapping the Second Half of the Olivet Discourse – Matthew 24:32-25:46*, Pre-Trib Research Center, viewed 19 May 2020, < <https://www.pre-trib.org/dr-thomas-ice/message/mapping-the-second-half-of-the-olivet-discourse-matthew-24-32-25-46/read>>

¹⁷⁶ Futurists do not readily admit that their hermeneutic presents a second chance to salvation as this is a major critique to their model and therefore Hitchcock (2012:240) tries to reason it away by stating, “God will preclude anyone who reject Christ *before* the Rapture from being saved *during* the Tribulation.” Yet, when confronted with the question if someone could be saved that did not utilise their opportunity to salvation before the rapture, Hitchcock (2012:241) admits, “Some who rejected the Lord before the Rapture will reconsider and humbly accept Jesus Christ as the Son of God – the One who purchased a pardon from sin for them on the cross.”

even in its perceived 'first phase,' namely the rapture. In Hebrews 9:27–28, Paul is clear that there is one judgment and one coming of Christ which will be faced by all:

And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.

In this passage, no distinction is made between Christians or Jews in terms of facing different resurrections and judgments. Yet, Hitchcock (2012:205) maintains that Christians will be resurrected at the rapture and that these "Church-age believers will appear before the judgment seat of Christ in heaven for reward." Only after seven years of tribulation will all "Old Testament believers... be resurrected and rewarded after the Second Coming" (Hitchcock, 2012:205). This is contra Scripture,¹⁷⁷ where even John quotes Christ's words to the conclusion of the Apocalypse, "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to his work." (Revelation 22:12)

One may argue within the futurist paradigm that this is referring to the rapture where only Christians are rewarded and resurrected, but even futurists admit that this text is a second coming passage, as can be seen in Table 4.2. Further to this passage is the important fact that it is an echo of an Old Testament passage¹⁷⁸ which specifically speaks of God's Old Testament people that would be rewarded at his coming.

Furthermore, in conclusion to his parable about harvest and reward, Christ states in Matthew 13:30 that the end time instruction from himself will be,

Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.

¹⁷⁷ The orthodox doctrine of the resurrection has always maintained that the resurrection of the righteous of all ages is one event.

¹⁷⁸ Indeed, the LORD has proclaimed about the end of the world: "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Surely your salvation is coming; Behold, His reward is with Him, And His work before Him'" (Isaiah 62:11).

Together with the rapture of the living Christians, those Christians that will be resurrected will only be rewarded at the time of harvest, which is also the time when the unrighteous as the tares will be rewarded. The parable teaches that the separation, called the rapture, is made at the 'harvest', which happens at the end of the world (Peth, 1988:520). According to Christ, "[A]s the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age." (Matthew 13:40) Since 'both grow together until the harvest', it is contradictory to teach a rapture seven years earlier (Peth, 1988:520). A resurrection of Christians seven years earlier than the second coming of Christ is therefore not possible. However, futurists attempt to fit this parable into their narrative. The futurist forefather, Scofield (1945:1016, footnote 1), for instance, does not believe that the gathering of the tares into bundles for burning implies immediate judgment, but suggests that the wheat is gathered into the barn first, regardless Christ's words, "First gather together the tares."

One should carefully query the a priori status of one's hermeneutical model when it incessantly impinges Scripture.

(iv) The Church raptured

Only Christian believers will be raptured to heaven; thus, the Church will be removed from this earth before end events take place. This hypothesis requires closer examination. Ryrie (2007:143) proposes, "[E]cclesiology, or the doctrine of the church, is the touchstone of dispensationalism (and also of pretribulationism)." He admits that the dispensational view regarding the church has been the subject of controversy and quotes Bass who is adamant about the distinction between the church and Israel. It is important to grasp this concept within futurist teaching. Ryrie (2007:143) declares this doctrine of the church to be a watershed in dispensationalism and highlights the following crucial elements of the Church: *The Church Has a Distinct Character, The Church Has a Distinct Time; The Church is Distinct from Israel*.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ LaRondelle (2003, as cited in Du Preez, 2003:382) concludes an essay wherein he challenges this construct of dispensationalism that the "Apocalypse visualizes and reenforces Paul's message that Jews and Gentiles are 'all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise' (Gal 3:28,29). In the kingdom of God and Christ, Israel and the church of the twelve apostles are indissolubly united as *one Israel of God*, through faith in the promised Messiah who

With this distinction clearly drawn, God's consequent plan for the Church should be established. There appears to be no real plan, besides the theocracy focus which the Church should help implement, according to many futurists. Hitchcock's (2012:205) view of God's prophetic plan for the church only beginning with the rapture – with the “next major event for the church” being “the judgment seat of Christ in heaven” – reflects the futurist view that the Apocalypse's visions start with the Church being secretly raptured. This is God's plan for his church in the dispensational paradigm. Lockyer (1998:45) explains that Revelation “Chapter 4 opens with John being raptured to heaven.” He suggests that John is a symbol type of the church that will be raptured. LaHaye (1999:112) explains this futurist interpretation, revealing that in the first three chapters of Revelation, the Church is mentioned 17 times. In Chapter 4, John, representing the Church, is raptured to heaven and looks down on the tribulation. The Church is only mentioned again in Chapter 19 when she returns with Christ at his glorious appearing. This indicates that she is not in the tribulation but raptured to heaven before it begins.

However, there is not one single verse in Revelation 4 that speaks of Christ's coming, the advent, or a rapture. The chapter only refers to John who was taken to heaven in vision. Moreover, LaHaye is not correct in stating that there is no further description or vision of the Church from chapters 4 to 18. What about the fifth seal in Revelation 6? What about the woman portraying the church in Revelation 12? LaHaye (1973:76) admits, “The Rapture of the church is not explicitly taught in Revelation 4 but definitely appears here chronologically at the end of the church age and before the Tribulation.” LaHaye herewith discloses that the Apocalypse should fit with the dispensational narrative and thus the Church needs to be removed.

What is the rationale behind the church being removed, except for dispensational reasoning? Chafer (1976:288) posits that it is Christ's way of “delivering His people from the *cosmos* world before the divine judgments fall upon it.” In the same vein, LaHaye (1999:112) deduces, “Since the Tribulation is especially the time of God's wrath, and since Christians are not appointed to wrath, then it follows that the church will be raptured

has appeared as Jesus of Nazareth, the Lamb of God, the 'Lion from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David' (5:5; cf. 22:16)."

before the Tribulation.” Thus, in summary, it is reasoned that the secret rapture takes place “to deliver God’s people from the coming wrath of the Tribulation” (Hitchcock, 2012:233).

LaHaye (1999:110) quotes 1 Thessalonians 1:10 as evidence for the Church being removed before the tribulation by the secret rapture, “to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even *Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*” LaHaye (1999:111) then proceeds to justify that this verse refers to the tribulation after the rapture when he declares, “The Christians in Thessalonica were awaiting the coming of Christ for His church – that is, the Rapture. They already knew the Tribulation (or ‘wrath to come’) would follow the Rapture, and that is the part that God has promised to keep the Christians ‘out of.’” What LaHaye states here cannot be seen anywhere in or around the text.

The question remains why God would entrust eschatology to the Church, just to remove the Church from this planet without eschatology affecting it. Linking to this question is the imperative, probing question: Why is the Book of Revelation at all needed or studied if it does not apply to the Church by any means? If the Church is removed through a secret rapture, is not this current eschatological exercise futile?

(v) Judgment of Christians

Hitchcock (2012:205) unfolds that the “next major event for the church will be the judgment seat of Christ in heaven.” This “judgment seat of Christ will occur in heaven immediately after the church is raptured to heaven,” according to Hitchcock (2012:207). He explains, “Since the judgment seat takes place after the Rapture, it makes sense that it will take place in heaven at the judgment seat of Christ” (Hitchcock, 2012:207). As stated earlier, this is not for all saved throughout history, for the “judgment seat of Christ is for believers only, and the judgment seat is not optional” (Hitchcock, 2012:208). According to the futurist approach, ‘believers’ here refer to believers in Christ, thus Christians from the church age. Hitchcock (2012:205) maintains, “At the judgment seat all believers from the church age – the time between the Day of Pentecost and the Rapture – will appear individually before God to receive rewards or loss of reward based on their life, service and ministry for the Lord.”

The question is whether this doctrine is scriptural, or whether it is rather of necessity to fit into the paradigm of futurism. Are the saved of all ages not saved by Christ through faith in him?¹⁸⁰ The author of Hebrews states, “For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.” (Hebrews 4:2)¹⁸¹ Does Scripture really teach a separate special judgment for believers of the last two thousand years?

4.2.4 The seven-year tribulation

This seven-year period is seen as an interruption between the last two of the seven dispensations of earth’s history, brought about by the secret rapture, as illustrated in Figure 4.5 below.

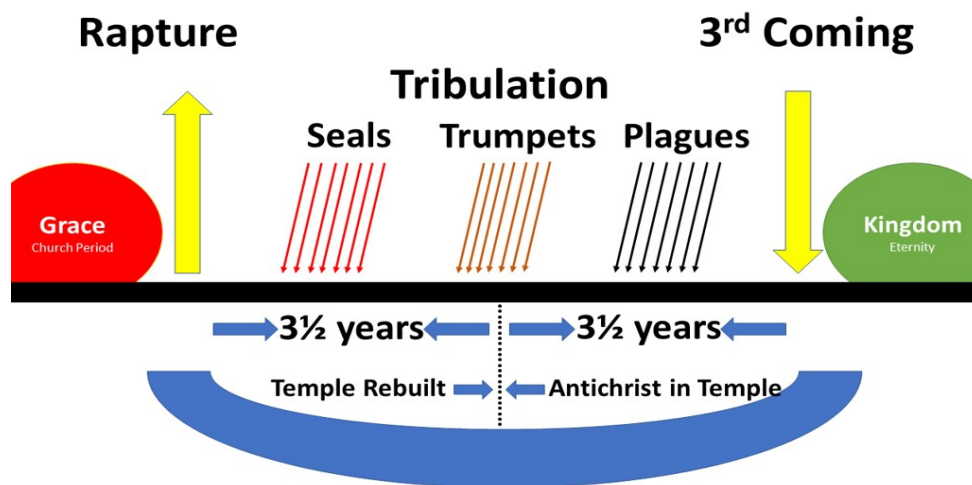


Figure 4.5 The seven-year tribulation

¹⁸⁰ Scripture declares, “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men” (Titus 2:11). Here, “all men” refer to all people of all ages. This is why Scripture says John exclaimed, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

¹⁸¹ See also Galatians 3:8.

(i) No believer in the tribulation

Whereas Scripture¹⁸² consistently teaches that “we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22), futurism proposes that in order for God to safeguard the Church against this coming tribulation, it should be removed from the earth. Ice and Price (2004, as cited in LaHaye, 2004:385) defend this position, assuring that “[t]he New Testament teaches that the current church age will also include trials and tribulation.” Yet, Ice and Price (2004, as cited in LaHaye, 2004:385) differentiate between these daily trials and the great coming tribulation, maintaining that “the persecution of the church in this age is not the wrath of God.” Therefore, according to this futurist model, God should remove the church for them to escape the tribulation.

To underscore this, Ice and Price (2004, as cited in LaHaye, 2004:385) emphatically state that the tribulation will come after the rapture of the Church and declare that it will be the greatest period of suffering the world has ever known. Ice and Price (2004, as cited in LaHaye, 2004:385) explain, “During this period, the Antichrist will emerge, persecution of new believers will ensue, and the great battle of Armageddon and the second coming of Christ will transpire.” In addition to the seals and trumpets in the Apocalypse that will supposedly occur during this tribulation, the seven last plagues will be the final wrath of God on a world rejecting his message. Yet, there is no implicit direction of a rapture or removal of the Church in her safeguarding from this tribulation in the Apocalypse. Instead, Revelation 13–16 is written in a style of warning to the Church as to go safely through this in a similar manner as Israel in Egypt went safely through the seven last plagues, which represent the plagues in Revelation. As indicated in Exodus 8:22–23 quoted below, none of the last seven of these plagues affected Israel as God directed Moses to instruct Pharaoh,

And in that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, in which My people dwell,
that no swarms of flies shall be there, in order that you may know that I am the

¹⁸² See 2 Thessalonians 1:4; Revelation 1:9; 2:9.

LORD in the midst of the land. I will make a difference between My people and your people. Tomorrow this sign shall be.

In similar fashion, Scripture (Psalm 91:9–11, emphasis added) promises that,

Because you have made the LORD, who is my refuge, Even the Most High, your dwelling place, No evil shall befall you, Nor shall **any plague** come near your dwelling; For He shall give His angels charge over you, To keep you in all your ways.

Therefore, the Apocalypse (Revelation 14:9–10, emphasis added) warns that,

If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of **the wrath of God**, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.

Why would Revelation warn the Church against this apostate worship in order to escape the wrath of God, namely the tribulation, if she will in any case be removed by the rapture? Futurists may argue that this warning is for those in the tribulation; yet, the epilogue of the Apocalypse (Revelation 22:18, emphasis added) that contains this stern warning remains to be explained,

For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him **the plagues** that are written in this book;

What would the reason be for such a warning that will especially apply to believers if they will not be here during the plagues, but raptured away? Ice and Price (2004, as cited in LaHaye, 2004:385) maintain that the tribulation will be a period of God's wrath upon a Christ-rejecting world from which God has promised to exempt the Church (Revelation 3:10). However, the scripture they apply here actually states that God will keep his people safe. In similar fashion, as described in the Old Testament Apocalypse, Daniel, which is foundational to Revelation, "God preserved and protected the *three Hebrew children*

without removing them from the fiery furnace” (Peth, 1988:518). Also, “God preserved and protected *Daniel in the lion’s den* **without removing** him from that place of danger” (Peth, 1988:518).

(ii) 70th week of Daniel 9

After the secret rapture, the world will descend into political and civil unrest. This will start the biblical end time tribulation that futurists claim will last for seven years. This seven-year period is taken from the 70-week prophecy in Daniel 9. According to futurists, “The Bible has more to say about these seven years than any other prophetic time period” (LaHaye, 2004:385). If this is true, where are the scriptural passages that refer to this seven-year tribulation? There is none. The only biblical passage that indicates a seven-year prophecy is a messianic prophecy in the Book of Daniel that subscribes time to Christ’s coming, whereto the wisemen of the east could refer, as well as Paul in Galatians 4:4. While almost all theological scholars of the last two millennia have agreed that this messianic time prophecy of 70 prophetic weeks refers to Christ’s first advent, futurists interject a gap into this time prophecy to obtain the seven years needed for the seven-year tribulation paradigm. Hitchcock (2012:68) explains that the “first sixty-nine weeks have already run their course.” Regarding the final period of seven years or what is commonly called the ‘seventieth week,’ Hitchcock (2012:68) pronounces, “[When] Israel rejected Jesus Christ as its Messiah, God suspended His plan for Israel.” About this last prophetic week of seven years, Hitchcock (2012:68) posits that there “is a gap, therefore, or parenthesis of unspecified duration between the sixty-ninth and seventieth set of seven.” The theological challenge, though, is that unless the biblical passage has an injunction to do so, one cannot split such a prophetic time period.

De Kock (2019:134) illustrates, “The seventy septennates were more than a period of prophetic time” for it can “also represent the patience and lovingkindness of a God who forgives again and again – until even he must draw a line in the sand” (De Kock, 2019:134). This is seen in Christ’s answer to Peter when he asked if you should forgive seven times. Christ replied (Matthew 18:22), “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.” De Kock (2019:134) quotes Wohlberg who reveals that

Jesus, who always chose His words carefully, included an important lesson in his response: 'Seventy times seven' equals 490, which is a perfect reference to the 70-week prophecy of Daniel 9.

Dispensationalists know that Daniel 9's prophecy is a probation from God to his people. (The very reason Christ equates it with forgiveness since he has forgiven his people for centuries). According to Hitchcock (2012:66), this prophecy indicates that "God has put Israel's future on a time clock." Therefore the gap is needed to still have Israel play a prophetic role. Expounding why he presupposes that this prophecy still applies to Israel in a future seven-year period, Hitchcock (2012:67) states, "The 490 years concerns the Jewish people and the city of Jerusalem, not the church. Gabriel tells Daniel this time period is 'for your people [Israel] and your holy city [Jerusalem] (9:24).'"

Hitchcock is correct in noting that the prophecy applies to the Jewish people and not the Church and that it is directly tied to their probation. Still, there is no textual justification, other than the dispensational model, to insert an unlimited time¹⁸³ gap into a specific time prophecy. DeMar (1999:325) confirms that this 'gap' "has been placed between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks of Daniel's prophecy" as it was "needed to make the dispensational hermeneutical model work." LaRondelle (1983:172) presents that "[t]he normal, natural, exegetical assumption is that the seventy consecutive weeks are an unbreakable unity" as "[t]hey are presented as a unit¹⁸⁴..." Therefore, nothing "in the text of Daniel 9:24–27 implies" such an unlimited time gap (DeMar, 1999:325), especially within the prophetic timelines of Daniel. Futurists would admit that Daniel 2, 7, 9 and 11 are all covering consecutive timelines, with Daniel 2 being foundational. In Daniel 2, the prophecy literally states that "after you, another kingdom will rise... Next a third kingdom... Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom..." Every apocalyptic event succeeds

¹⁸³ It is unlimited, as no one knows when Christ will return.

¹⁸⁴ LaRondelle (1983:172) sets before the reader that E. J. Young concludes, "If there is no warrant for inserting a gap in Jeremiah's prophecy, what warrant is there for doing so in the prophecy of the seventy sevens? Had there been a gap in Jeremiah's prophecy (Jer 25:10) Daniel could never have understood the years of the captivity." "Never," concludes Philip Mauro, "has a specific number of time-units, making up a described stretch of time, been taken to mean anything but continuous or consecutive time-units." Because the other predicted time periods are consecutive, the natural expectation can only be that the seventy weeks of Daniel are also consecutive.

the other without interruption. It is thus not only suspect, but totally improbable that such a prophetic timeline is interrupted with another non-prophetic line.

De Kock (2002:20) quotes Johnson who explains the result of the rejection of Christ and his crucifixion by relating Israel to a train taken off onto a sidetrack to remain there for 1 900 years, but which is now ready to complete her run. In its place the Church had been introduced. Johnson concludes, “Since the period of the church is signless and timeless, these past 1900 years are a ‘time-out’ period as in football and basketball.” Subsequently, De Kock (2019:134) aptly resolves, “The Lord’s great time prophecies are not really a train or a football game. And there is nothing in any of them, and especially not in Dan. 9:24–27, to suggest a gap.”

Furthermore, De Kock (2019:134) clarifies, “When the Lord’s messenger said to Daniel, ‘Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city’ (Dan. 9:24), he was trying to explain, not obscure, the prophecy.” Therefore, this messenger to Daniel “obviously meant seven consecutive septennates, exactly 490 years, not 2490 years or more” (De Kock, 2019:134). Additionally, there is no prophetic indication that the Jewish people would be paused, so called, within one time prophecy, as De Kock (2019:134) observes that “[i]f he had wanted to put the Jewish nation on hold for two millennia, he would have said so quite clearly, for ‘the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets’ (Amos 3:7, RSV).”

Figure 4.6 below shows Hitchcock’s (2012:70) outline of the futurist interpretation of Daniel 9.

OVERVIEW OF THE SEVENTY WEEKS	
Daniel 9:24	The entire seventy weeks (490 years)
Daniel 9:25	The first sixty-nine weeks: 7 weeks + 62 weeks (483 years or 173,880 days)
Daniel 9:26	The time between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks (? years, the current age)
Daniel 9:27	The seventieth week (seven years)

Figure 4.6 Hitchcock’s outline of the futurist interpretation of Daniel 9

Subsequently, Hitchcock (2012:70) illustrates this futurist interpretation of Daniel 9 as shown in Figure 4.7:

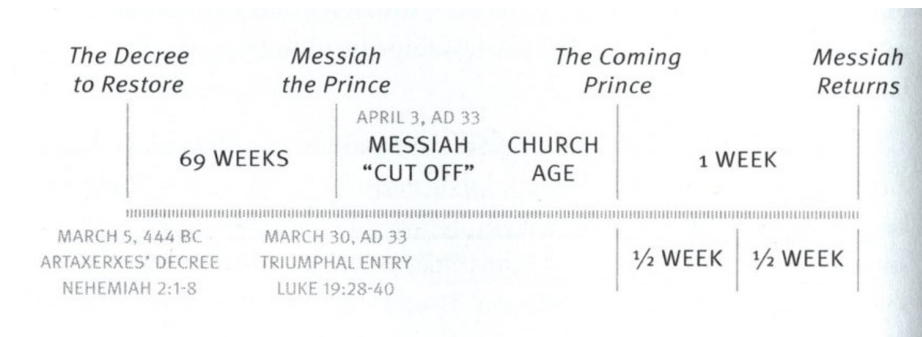


Figure 4.7 Hitchcock's illustration of the futurist interpretation of Daniel 9

What Hitchcock does not clearly indicate, is the tremendous ever-growing gap futurists insert into this time prophecy. His illustration can thus be modified to emphasise this ever-growing gap, as shown in Figure 4.8 below.

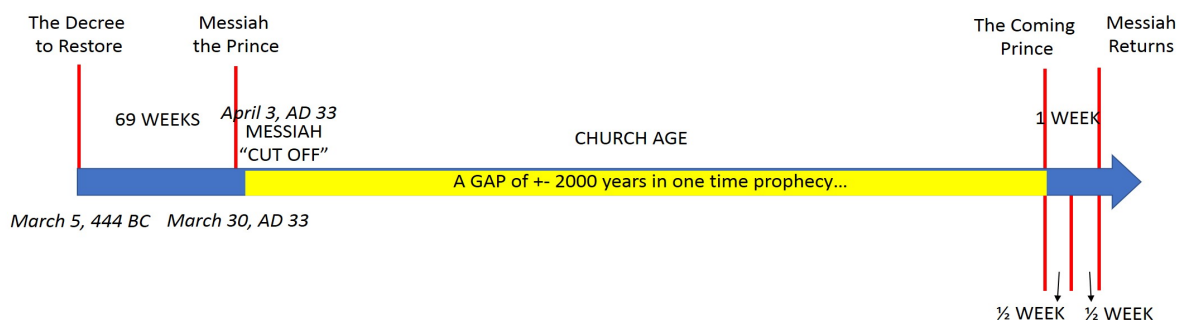


Figure 4.8 The ever-increasing gap in Hitchcock's illustration of the futurist interpretation of Daniel 9

Theologically it is inexplicable how such a growing gap can be textually justified. De Kock (2019:133) correctly perceives that futurists “detach the last septennate or 7 years and push it some 2,000 years into the future, for the purpose of fitting it into their end-time theology.” De Kock (2002:20) thus concludes unequivocally that the “Gap theory is inherently and deeply flawed, for it defies all known laws of arithmetic and common sense, as well as what the Bible teaches.”

Futurists establish this seven-year period of Daniel 9 by quoting the following Apocalyptic time prophecies:

- times, time, and half a time (Revelation 12:14)
- 1260 days (Revelation 11:3)
- 42 months (Revelation 11:2; 13:5)

Ice and Price (2004, as cited in LaHaye, 2004:390) assert, “These time indicators, each a different way of indicating three-and-a-half years, reflect the two halves of the seven-year Tribulation period – the seventieth week of Daniel 9:24–27.”

With this established, it is evident that the gap theory is associated with the notion that the three-and-a-half years/42 months/1 260 days refer to literal, calendar time (De Kock, 2002:20). However, there is a fatal flaw in such literalistic interpretation¹⁸⁵ of these apocalyptic time prophecies, to which futurists agree. The passages are speaking of the same time period, namely a three-and-a-half-year period, interpreted to be a double period to align with Daniel 9’s seven years.

De Kock (2002:18) refers to this fatal flaw as an “arithmetic error in Dispensationalist prophetic calculation.” Discernibly, futurists “believe this three-and-a-half-year period to be literal, calendar time 1,260 non-symbolic days or 42 actual months” (De Kock, 2002:20) but “[s]imply stated, the heart of the Dispensationalist error is that the three-and-a-half years/42 months/1,260 days must be prophetic and not literal time, because they are shorter than three-and-a-half years on the calendar” (De Kock, 2002:20).

De Kock (2002:20) shows how flawed this literalistic application of the prophetic time prophecies is by highlighting that “[t]he actual number [of days per year] is 365.2422 days. Calculating on this basis, we have the following: $365.2422 \times 3.5 = 1,278$ days; not 1,260 days. There is an 18-day discrepancy!” This is so simple and yet so profound.

De Kock (2002:20) further notes, “Dispensationalist computation also does not constitute 42 months of literal time but somewhat less than 41-and-a-half months. Therefore the 1,260 days cannot be part of the seven-year tribulation that Dispensationalist theology

¹⁸⁵ In section 5.2.5 the symbolic nature of these time prophecies will be explained.

insists on.” It is therefore evident that these time prophecies in the Apocalypse cannot refer to the 70 weeks of Daniel 9:24–27. De Kock (2002:21) draws an unsettling conclusion based on this calculation error of futurism.

The seven-years' tribulation, supposedly beginning with the three-and-a-half years referred to, becomes an unnecessary hypothesis, together with that of the peculiar Gap mentioned above. So does the rapture (allegedly separated by seven years from the Lord's return in glory). Furthermore, the discovery of this error undermines the idea that Israel and the Christian church are separate, discontinuous entities.

(iii) The Jewish temple is rebuilt

Price (2004, as cited in LaHaye, 2004:372) pronounces, “The Temple of the Tribulation will be built by unbelieving Jews and desecrated by the Antichrist (Isaiah 66:1–6; Daniel 9:27; 11:36–45; 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4; Revelation 11:1–2).” These passages in no way predict that the temple in Jerusalem will be rebuilt. The Isaiah passage refers to true worship among his people and does not even imply a rebuilding of a third temple. Regarding Daniel 9, Price (2004, as cited in LaHaye, 2004:372) postulates, “[The] covenant established in Daniel 9:27 may result in the rebuilding of the Third Temple because the breaking of the covenant occurs by the interruption of the renewed sacrificial system through ‘the abomination that makes desolate’.” Please note how Price admits that “Daniel 9:27 **may** result” in the temple to be rebuilt as this passage does not state or imply it; rather, it is part of the dispensational model and seven-year notion dealt with earlier. In similar regard, Daniel 11:36–45 says or implies nothing of a rebuilt temple.

Concerning 2 Thessalonians, Price (2004, as cited in LaHaye, 2004:372) reasons, “The apostle Paul predicted the Antichrist would perform this desecration... by seating himself within the Temple and usurping the place of divine manifestation...” While 2 Thessalonians does mention a temple, such a literalistic reading of 2 Thessalonians is too superficial. The Greek word used here for temple, ναός (*naos*), is consistently and incontestably used by Paul in his letters, not to apply “to a building in Jerusalem, but to the Church” (Wohlberg, 2000:84).

With respect to Revelation 11:1–2, Price (2004, as cited in LaHaye, 2004:372) hypothesises, “John, who likewise expected the Antichrist (1 John 2:18), placed him in the Temple courts as the Gentile forces invade Jerusalem (Revelation 11:1–2).”

Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, “Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months.

This is the only scriptural passage that may indicate a rebuilt temple, if taken literally as futurists do. However, the flaws in interpreting these 42 months as being part of the seven-year tribulation period have already been established.¹⁸⁶ Since it has been indicated as incorrect and textually and mathematically impossible to apply literally, it already calls into question the literal reading of this passage. Additionally, when reading contextually, Revelation 11 that starts out with the temple, moves, and climaxes in further temple narration where it specifically states the temple “was opened in heaven”. Furthermore, in its introduction and epilogue, Revelation 11 terms this temple “the temple of God”.

Hence, the issue remains how futurists can presume that a temple will be rebuilt by the Jews, which will be the third temple in Jerusalem’s history.

Hitchcock (2012:234) unveils the premise of futurist reasoning after explaining how the Antichrist will form a covenant with Israel that is supposed to result in peace in the Middle East as the Jews will be given the “right to offer sacrifices” which “assumes a Jewish Temple must be rebuilt.” Note the word he uses – “assumes”. Thus, the doctrine of a rebuilt third temple is an ‘assumed’ notion.

As a Jew who became a Christian, Wohlberg (2000:79) are strongly displeased with the suggested notion of a rebuilt temple and rightly asks,

Would the providence of God ever lead the Jewish people to rebuild a third temple? Would the Father ever initiate the restarting of sacrifices that ended

¹⁸⁶ See section 3.2.4: (ii) 70th Week of Daniel 9.

with the death of His Son? When Jesus cried out, 'It is finished' (John 19:30), He abolished all sacrifices. He was the final Sacrifice! Therefore, would not the restarting of sacrifices be an open denial that Jesus Christ is the Messiah? If Israel ever did build a third temple and begin to offer sacrifices, would not this be another official, national rejection of the Saviour?

Within the dispensation model, all the promises and prophecies in Scripture need to be fulfilled. However, the prophecies indicating that Israel brings the light to the gentiles have not yet been fulfilled; thus, this element needs to be added within this paradigm.

LaHaye (1973:109) explicitises, "The greatest revival the world has ever known is yet to come." This revival, he indicates, will not occur within the church age but during the period of tribulation (LaHaye, 1973:109), after the rapture. He refers to Revelation 7 which numerates the 144 000 and argues, "If we let the 'plain sense of Scripture make common sense,' it becomes clear that the 144,000 are Jews" (LaHaye, 1973:110). In this very literalistic and mechanical interpretation, the technical detail will be 100% precise as LaHaye (1973:111) details, "There will be 12,000 Jews from each of the 12 tribes of Israel, making a total of 144,000." This Jewish group will globally be dispersed and will evangelise the world, as LaHaye (1973:111) ascertains, and the evangelisation of the 144 000 will proceed among those who have not been deceived by the Antichrist.

LaHaye (1973:118), after describing the "momentous occurrences" which the secret rapture will unleash, highlights the "ideal" conditions that will be established for the conversions that will prove the greatest evangelism success of all time. These include: an "ideal mental climate" placed "in the minds of millions by the Rapture," the "144,000 Apostle Paul types, plus an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as in the day of Pentecost," and the "chaotic conditions designed by God to shake man from his false sense of security." Owing to the spiritual conditions during the first half of the tribulation, LaHaye (1973:118) imagines that more than double the percentage of people will be won to Christ then, essentially "because of the enormous population, this will result in more souls harvested to Christ than have been saved during the entire history of the church." This is a tremendous prediction to be made.

LaHaye (2004:256) emphatically declares that “THE GREATEST REVIVAL the world has ever known will not occur during the church age but immediately following, during the first 21 months of the Tribulation.” Now note that, according to LaHaye (1973:110), this will transpire “at the beginning of the Tribulation, [when] the 144,000 servants of God will be sealed and begin their ministry of preaching the Gospel, attended by a mighty worldwide soul harvest which will culminate in a severe time of persecution for believers, inspired by the Antichrist.”

The 144 000 Jews will therefore start their preaching when the Church is raptured, and the seven years of tribulation starts its countdown. Revelation calls these 144 000 servants of God. LaHaye (1973:113) confirms that they will “be preaching the same message that the Apostle Paul or the Apostle Peter preached.” This implies that they will already have been converted to Christianity before the rapture in order to know Christ and the New Testament to be able to preach Christ crucified to the world. LaHaye (1973:111) admits that these 144 000 will have been converted to Christ prior as they will turn to the book of Revelation to know the duration of the tribulation and what to expect from it.

The logical deduction is then that these converts from Judaism to Christ will not have become part of the Church as they will not have been raptured with the Church to heaven. However, if they are not numbered among the Church, it remains to be explained what Paul meant when he said in Galatians 3:27–28:

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Wohlberg (2000:120) points out that, according to Paul, Jews and Gentiles are now “one” and are part of the “the same body” through Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:14; 3:4–6). This means everyone that believes in Christ is a Christian and part of the Church. Therefore, Wohlberg (2000:120) asks, “Does the last book in the Bible contradict the words of Paul? Does Revelation rebuild a wall between Jews and Gentiles that Jesus Christ abolished at the cross?”

4.2.5 The Antichrist appears

Hindson (2004, as cited in LaHaye, 2004:25) presents the futurist view that “[o]nly after the rapture of the church will the identity of the Antichrist be revealed.” Consequently, he points out that one does not want to know who the Antichrist is, as if one is able to figure that out, one has been left behind (Hindson, 2004, as cited in LaHaye, 2004:25). So, immediately after the rapture, the Antichrist will make his appearance and the tribulation will commence.

LaHaye (1973:150) expounds that at the start of “the Tribulation Period is the signing of the covenant with the Antichrist.” He indicates that the Jews will make an agreement with the Antichrist, which will permit them to take the city of Jerusalem from the Arabs, allowing the Jews to rebuild the temple and “once again institute the sacrificial system” (LaHaye, 1973:150). Hitchcock (2012:234) quotes Charles Dyer who affirms the above and further observes, “This world ruler will succeed where Kissinger, Carter, Reagan, Bush and other world leaders have failed. He will be known as the man of peace!”

LaHaye (1973:150) confirms that this temple will be built at the start of the tribulation. He further reveals that sometime during this seven-year period the Antichrist will die and be resurrected. Satan will thus duplicate the resurrection,¹⁸⁷ after which he will have the power to perform ‘signs and lying wonders’ (LaHaye, 1973:174).

Moreover, following this supernatural resurrection, the Antichrist, in the middle of the tribulation, will defy God and sit in his temple, presenting himself as God (LaHaye, 1973:149). Subsequently, the Antichrist will break his agreement with the Jews and set up his idol in the midst of the temple (LaHaye, 1973:150). During the second half of the tribulation, the unredeemed will then worship him (LaHaye, 1999:282). LaHaye (1973:174) announces that it “is then that he will unleash his attack on the nation of

¹⁸⁷ De Kock (2019:136) contests this by arguing, “LaHaye ...states that in the middle of that seven-year period the Antichrist will die, but Satan will resurrect and dwell in him, performing great miracles. What an idea! The devil, himself a mortal being eventually doomed to destruction (Eze. 28:17–18), cannot raise the dead. This is the prerogative of God and of his Christ (John 5:25-26), who declared, ‘I am the resurrection, and the life’ (John 11:25).”

Israel... He will seek to put to death all those who do not bear his mark or bow down and worship him as God.”

Hindson (2004, as cited in LaHaye, 2004:25) suggests that the world, which is currently seeking oneness and needs a leader who can enable “peaceful coexistence between the nations” is ready to receive the Antichrist “in the immediate future.”

Subsequently, Hindson (2004, as cited in LaHaye, 2004:25) remarks, “[The] Antichrist will be the most incredible political leader the world has ever known. On the surface he will appear to be the epitome of human genius and power.” LaHaye (1973:172) offers that this Antichrist “will not gain control by war but by tricking the leaders of the world into the idea that he can offer peace,” after which, “by gaining enough support from each of the ten kings of the earth,” he will “end up with control of all of them.” He maintains that the rulers of the earth will believe that they are incapable of governing in peace with other nations of the world, from which point the beast, being granted all the power and strength, will be able to establish his one-world government (LaHaye, 1973:173).

Consequently, the Antichrist “will control the last great bastion of Gentile world power. From his base in the West, he will extend his control over the entire world” (Hindson, 2004, as cited in LaHaye, 2004:25). In addition to administering the world government and the global economy (Hindson, 2004, as cited in LaHaye, 2004:25), he will also institute atheism globally, as according to LaHaye (1973:173), the “Antichrist’s true religion will be atheism.”

The seven-year period will be especially a period of tribulation as God will unleash his judgment on a rebellious world. Hitchcock (2012:235) describes that the “Tribulation will be the darkest hour in human history.”

LaHaye (1973:98) depicts three chronological judgments, namely seals, trumpets, and bowls, that will each represent a period of the tribulation. The seal judgments will take place after the rapture has transpired, covering approximately the first quarter of the tribulation or the first twenty-one months (LaHaye, 1973:98). After these seals, God will invoke the trumpet judgments, introducing physical judgment upon the earth (LaHaye, 1973:129). Lastly, God will release the bowl judgments as final punishment in the last

three-and-a-half-year period¹⁸⁸ of the tribulation. LaHaye (1973:209) confirms that God will bring “great judgment and calamity on mankind” during this time and explains that “[t]hese bowls constitute what the Lord Jesus referred to as the ‘great tribulation’ (Matt. 21:21), or the last forty-two months of the Tribulation Period” (LaHaye, 1973:211).

Hitchcock (2012:234) echoes the logical question, “Why would God pour out His wrath and judgment on the world He created?” In answer, he lists the following 5 reasons (Hitchcock, 2012:238–240):

To prepare Israel - The “Tribulation will bring the Jewish people to their knees in submission to God.” LaHaye (1973:174) indicates that the Antichrist’s persecution of the Jews will be the “greatest anti-Semitic movement the world has ever known.”

To punish sinners - “God will use the Tribulation to punish the godless Gentile nations” when “one-fourth of the world’s population will be wiped out” (LaHaye, 1973:105).

To prove God’s power - “God will prove to a rebellious world that He alone is God.”

To portray Satan’s true character - “Satan will be fully manifest as the world experiences the final firestorm from the dragon.”

To provide salvation - God will “use the Tribulation to drive men to Himself in repentance and trust.”

Theodically, some of these postulations create serious questions.

4.2.6 Second Coming and the millennium

Christ will first establish his kingdom before he reigns. Hitchcock (2012:466–467) portrays that, as Christ descends with the Church to establish his kingdom, he will return to the Mount of Olives and slay the armies gathered against Him throughout the land, “from Megiddo to Petra.” One of his first actions will be to cast the Antichrist and the false prophet into the lake of fire, whereafter Christ will cleanse the temple in Jerusalem and thus the abomination of desolation will be removed from the temple. Israel will then be regathered (as dispensationalism needs Israel to be the nation of God and a light to the world). Still establishing his kingdom, Christ will then judge both the Jews and the Gentiles

¹⁸⁸ Hitchcock (2012:466) rather believes that the “trumpet judgments are unleashed throughout the final half of the Tribulation” and that the “bowl judgments are poured out in rapid succession” at the end of the tribulation, just before Christ’s coming.

who survived the tribulation. After dealing with the Antichrist, his system and followers, Christ will deal with his arch enemy, and Satan will be bound in the Abyss. When Christ has removed his enemies, “Old Testament and Tribulation saints are resurrected and rewarded” (Hitchcock, 2012:467).

Now the “one-thousand-year reign of Christ on earth” (Hitchcock 2012:467) can eventually commence from his throne in Jerusalem. This reign will mainly revolve around his people, the Jews. Hitchcock (2012:467) thus believes that at the outset of this thousand-year period, the millennial temple will be constructed or at least begun.

Hitchcock (2012:421) reveals that the reason why futurists “need the Millennium” in their futuristic paradigm “is to fulfill the biblical covenants,” for in “these covenants, God made very specific promises to Israel.” Hitchcock (2012:421) goes even so far as to state that the “Millennium is no optional part of God’s plan for the end times. It must occur for God to keep His promises” which brings everything back to the foundation of dispensationalism.

At the end of the thousand years, Christ will loosen Satan from the abyss which will result in “Satan’s Final Revolt and Defeat” (Hitchcock, 2012:467). Hereafter, according to Hitchcock (2012:467), “The Great White Throne Judgment of the Lost” will proceed, that which will result in eternal damnation.

At the end of the millennial reign of Christ, “the destruction of the present heavens and earth” will take place to bring an end to all dispensations and introduce an “Eternity” with God in glory (Hitchcock, 2012:467). After the destruction of the present cosmos, “the creation of the new heavens and new earth” will take place (Hitchcock, 2012:467).

4.2.7 Theocracy focus

Futurists reason that humanism is destroying the country they love while it is supposed to move Israel onto the world stage. They believe that the USA will be corrupted and destroyed unless Christians drastically change the political environment. LaHaye writes in his *Battle for the Mind* that this growing humanism “will deluge the entire land in the next few years, unless Christians are willing to become much more assertive in defense

of morality and decency than they have been during the past three decades."¹⁸⁹ Therefore, all Christians should unify against this threat, for if "America is going to be saved from Secular Humanism, it will take the combined efforts of the pro-moral majority" (LaHaye, 2000:259).

The logical question is, however, why a futurist proponent of the secret rapture, who teaches that God will save his Church from certain tribulation, would worry about a decline of morality in society if that will just help to bring on the rapture, and why such a prophetic interpreter would want to be involved in politics. "Premillennialists believe that since God has a plan, the future is already set in motion. It might seem logical that if events taking place on earth are part of God's pre-ordained plan, then political activism is unnecessary."¹⁹⁰ In this seemingly anomaly, LaHaye "explains why Christians who share his Biblical worldview should be politically active."¹⁹¹

Because LaHaye sees¹⁹² "humanism as the great evil threatening to destroy America,"¹⁹³ he "coined the term 'pre-tribulation tribulation' to characterise what will come about if humanists are allowed to take control of the government."¹⁹⁴ In his book, *The Battle for the Mind*, LaHaye explains that "the Great Tribulation is predestined and will surely come to pass." However, according to the author, if liberal humanists succeed to take control of

¹⁸⁹ Theocracy Watch, n.d., *Christian Zionism*, Theocracy Watch, viewed 22 March 2020, <http://www.theocracywatch.org/christian_zionism.htm#Postmillennialism>

¹⁹⁰ Theocracy Watch, n.d., *Christian Zionism*, Theocracy Watch, viewed 22 March 2020, <http://www.theocracywatch.org/christian_zionism.htm#Postmillennialism>

¹⁹¹ Theocracy Watch, n.d., *Christian Zionism*, Theocracy Watch, viewed 22 March 2020, <http://www.theocracywatch.org/christian_zionism.htm#Postmillennialism>

¹⁹² The reader may argue that LaHaye is only one voice. Do not underestimate his influence (even if he is late). In 2005, Unger writes, "The author or co-author of more than 75 books, LaHaye in 2001 was named the most influential American evangelical leader of the past 25 years by the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals. With more than 63 million copies of his "Left Behind" novels sold, he is one of the best-selling authors in all of American history." (Unger, G 2005, *American Rapture*, Vanity Fair, viewed 27 May 2020, <<https://archive.vanityfair.com/article/2005/12/american-rapture>>).

¹⁹³ Theocracy Watch, n.d., *Christian Zionism*, Theocracy Watch, viewed 22 March 2020, <http://www.theocracywatch.org/christian_zionism.htm#Postmillennialism>

¹⁹⁴ Theocracy Watch, n.d., *Christian Zionism*, Theocracy Watch, viewed 22 March 2020, <http://www.theocracywatch.org/christian_zionism.htm#Postmillennialism>

the government, there will be a “pre-Tribulation tribulation” which will “engulf” America. This, according to LaHaye, is neither predestined nor necessary,¹⁹⁵ but can be prevented by Christians and the Church if they will stand up for God. The secret rapture exists in the futurist model to safeguard the Church against tribulation. Therefore, a pre-tribulation tribulation is unnecessary and should be prevented.

Theocracy Watch quotes futurists saying that “unless born-again Christians acted politically ... they would lose their ... [ability] to fulfill Biblical prophecy.”¹⁹⁶ How will Christians fulfill prophecy? According to futurism, the Church is the buffer that prevents the world from falling into chaos, namely the tribulation. Once the Church is removed, the world will plunge into global disaster. The Church is thus fulfilling prophecy by keeping the government out of the hands of humanists that will bring the world to tribulation. Consequently, this means that God and his law is needed back in government.

If Christians can help fulfill prophecy, then heads of prophetic nations can do so all the more. Most futurists are also Christian Zionists denoting their avid support for Israel. Borger captures how Christian Zionism has become the ‘majority theology’ among white US Evangelicals, who represent about a quarter of the adult population. In a 2015 poll, 73% of evangelical Christians said events in Israel are prophesied in the Book of Revelation.¹⁹⁷ Ice (2017:213), in his book titled *The Case for Zionism. Why Christians should support Israel!* concludes, “We will stand on biblical conviction as we constantly watch for the further outworking of God’s historical plan, revolving around His people Israel...” Ice (2017:211) relates how US President Truman’s Christian Zionism came into play during two of the greatest decisions he had to make during his presidency.¹⁹⁸ To

¹⁹⁵ Theocracy Watch, n.d., *Christian Zionism*, Theocracy Watch, viewed 22 March 2020, <http://www.theocracywatch.org/christian_zionism.htm#Postmillennialism>

¹⁹⁶ Theocracy Watch, n.d., *Christian Zionism*, Theocracy Watch, viewed 22 March 2020, <http://www.theocracywatch.org/christian_zionism.htm#Postmillennialism>

¹⁹⁷ Borger, J 2019, ‘*Brought to Jesus: the evangelical grip on the Trump administration*’, The Guardian, viewed 28 May 2020, <<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/jan/11/trump-administration-evangelical-influence-support>>

¹⁹⁸ “First, how should the United States vote on the partition of Israel, which would result in the creation of the new Jewish state, during the United Nations vote in late November of 1947? Second, should the United

futurists, Truman miraculously chose to affirm Israel as a new nation, thereby fulfilling biblical prophecy. Relaying what Truman said regarding assisting in creating the state of Israel – “What do you mean ‘helped to create’? I am Cyrus. I am Cyrus” (Ice, 2017:212) – they even propose that he was aware that he was fulfilling prophecy, appealing to the biblical figure of Cyrus that freed the Jews from Babylonian captivity.

Parenthetically, the same prophecy is applied in our times to Donald Trump as “leading evangelicals see Trump as a latter-day King Cyrus,”¹⁹⁹ according to Borger. This paradigm was further strengthened by the US embassy move to Jerusalem in 2018, as this was exactly 70 years after Israel’s independence in 1948, thus confirming Trump as antitype of Cyrus as is indicated in the newly released book by Wallnau, *Cyrus Trump*.²⁰⁰ Borger writes that two futurist pastors oversaw the main speaking slots at this embassy move to Jerusalem, “both ardent Christian Zionists: Robert Jeffress... and John Hagee, a televangelist and founder of Christians United for Israel (Cufi)”²⁰¹ and so, for “many evangelicals, the move cemented Trump’s status as the new Cyrus...”²⁰² Futurist Hagee, who is also a fervent Zionist, biblisises the US president in saying that “President Trump is preaching America first. Thank God for it – this is Nationalism. God bless you Mr. President.”²⁰³

States diplomatically recognize the newly formed nation when David Ben-Gurion declared the birth of Israel on May 14, 1948?

On both issues, virtually all of Truman’s personal advisors, the State Department, and the military establishment were opposed to him” (Ice, 2017:211).

¹⁹⁹ Borger, J 2019, *‘Brought to Jesus’: the evangelical grip on the Trump administration*, The Guardian, viewed 28 May 2020, <<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/jan/11/trump-administration-evangelical-influence-support>>

²⁰⁰ Lance Wallnau n.d., *Lance Wallnau*, Lance Wallnau, viewed 20 September 2018, <<https://lancewallnau.com/>>

²⁰¹ Borger, J 2019, *‘Brought to Jesus’: the evangelical grip on the Trump administration*, The Guardian, viewed 28 May 2020, <<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/jan/11/trump-administration-evangelical-influence-support>>

²⁰² Borger, J 2019, *‘Brought to Jesus’: the evangelical grip on the Trump administration*, The Guardian, viewed 28 May 2020, <<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/jan/11/trump-administration-evangelical-influence-support>>

²⁰³ Hagee, J 2020, *God is Working*, YouTube, viewed 13 July 2020, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Sc2sdbVlfQ> (14:01)>

It is in the context of Zionism, together with strong US nationalism, that Hitchcock (2009:127–128) writes, “Since Israel is pictured in Scripture as a thriving nation in the end times... I believe America must remain strong until the time of the Rapture to serve as Israel’s chief ally and protector.” The clear principle here is that the USA should be kept strong as to boost Israel to its prophetic stance amongst the nations. Therefore, futurists view President Trump as a prophetic figure with his ‘Make America Great Again’ slogan. Even foreign policy is seen in prophetic terms. For instance, Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo,²⁰⁴ a futurist himself, said, “[T]he work that our administration’s done, to make sure that this democracy in the Middle East, that this Jewish state, remains. I am confident that the Lord is at work here.”²⁰⁵ He also affirmed his Zionist stance by stating, “As secretary of state and as a Christian, I’m proud to lead American diplomacy to support Israel’s right to defend itself.”²⁰⁶ Concerning God in government, he said at a ‘God and Country Rally’ in 2015, “We will continue to fight these battles,” because there is a “never-ending struggle” until “the rapture.”²⁰⁷ He calls on Christians to become politically active. “Be part of it,” he said at the meeting at the Summit Church in Wichita, Kansas. “Be in the

²⁰⁴ Wong writes, “No secretary of state in recent decades has been as open and fervent as Mr. Pompeo about discussing Christianity and foreign policy in the same breath. That has increasingly raised questions about the extent to which evangelical beliefs are influencing American diplomacy.” (Wong, E 2019, *The Rapture and the Real World: Mike Pompeo Blends Beliefs and Policy*, The New York Times, viewed 2 June 2020, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/30/us/politics/pompeo-christian-policy.html>>).

²⁰⁵ Wong, E 2019, *The Rapture and the Real World: Mike Pompeo Blends Beliefs and Policy*, The New York Times, viewed 2 June 2020, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/30/us/politics/pompeo-christian-policy.html>>

²⁰⁶ Wong, E 2019, *The Rapture and the Real World: Mike Pompeo Blends Beliefs and Policy*, The New York Times, viewed 2 June 2020, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/30/us/politics/pompeo-christian-policy.html>>

²⁰⁷ Wong, E 2019, *The Rapture and the Real World: Mike Pompeo Blends Beliefs and Policy*, The New York Times, viewed 2 June 2020, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/30/us/politics/pompeo-christian-policy.html>>

fight.”²⁰⁸ Futurists are not only calling for political activism; they are calling for a spiritual war.²⁰⁹

This fight must place God and his law back in government. Hagee, referring to this humanist take over, says they “want to destroy faith in God. The Ten Commandments have been removed. They mock God in public schools and universities.”²¹⁰ This is why futurists try to prove that the critical element needed back in government is God’s law. In proving this point, LaHaye (2000:19) quotes President Truman stating, “The fundamental basis of this nation’s law was given to Moses on the Mount... If we don’t have the proper fundamental moral background, we will finally wind up with a totalitarian government...” Therefore, Hitchcock (2009:136) calls on Christians to “elect godly leaders, to pray for them... to support them and vote for government policies that are righteous and good, to speak out and vote against government policies and actions that are unrighteous and harmful...” Harding shows that in similar fashion “LaHaye urged Christians to pray and witness as usual and also to help the victims of humanism ... to join the national drive to register Christian voters ... to run for public office.”²¹¹ Robertson agrees that this humanist agenda “will one day become an instrument of oppression against the Christians and Jews” (Gulley, 1998:215) as the pre-tribulation tribulation should be politically fought. Therefore, Robertson concludes, “We must rebuild the foundation of a free, sovereign America from the grass roots, precinct by precinct, city by city, state by state” (as quoted by Gulley, 1998:215).

In a push for a theocracy in the USA, LaHaye (2000:117) pleads with Christians, “We have some momentous decisions to make.” The author then asks, “Will we go back to the

²⁰⁸ Wong, E 2019, *The Rapture and the Real World: Mike Pompeo Blends Beliefs and Policy*, The New York Times, viewed 2 June 2020, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/30/us/politics/pompeo-christian-policy.html>>

²⁰⁹ LaHaye (2000:259) writes, “We are in a gigantic, cosmic war for the soul of our country – and it takes armies to win wars. We need an army of pro-moral activists, encouraged by their Bible-believing ministers, who will provide America with the spiritual and moral leadership for which this country yearns.”

²¹⁰ Hagee, J 2020, *God is Working*, YouTube, viewed 13 July 2020, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Sc2sdbVIfQ> (14:12)>

²¹¹ Theocracy Watch, n.d., *Christian Zionism*, Theocracy Watch, viewed 22 March 2020, <http://www.theocracywatch.org/christian_zionism.htm#Postmillennialism>

Christ of the Bible? Or will we go on to atheism, statism, socialism, chaos, and despair?” Gulley (1998:219) responds to such statements and specifies that what makes these futurists “so dangerous is their deep conviction that God is using them to redeem America, to restore it as a Christian nation, to enforce a Christian agenda on the nation in spite of what non-Christians think.”

4.2.8 Construction of the key futurist teachings

In conclusion, Figure 4.9 below illustrates how futurism is constructed upon the foundation of dispensationalism, and a floorwork of literalism. This gives basis and credence to its four main pillars, namely the secret rapture, the coming of the Antichrist, the 7-year tribulation, and the Second Coming and the millennium. These four pillars provide the scope and argument for futurism’s theocracy agenda in which it is believed the prevailing godlessness should be withstood as this will lead to a pre-tribulation tribulation and that therefore a Christian government should be instituted, which will assist in fulfilling prophecy in bringing Israel to the world stage.

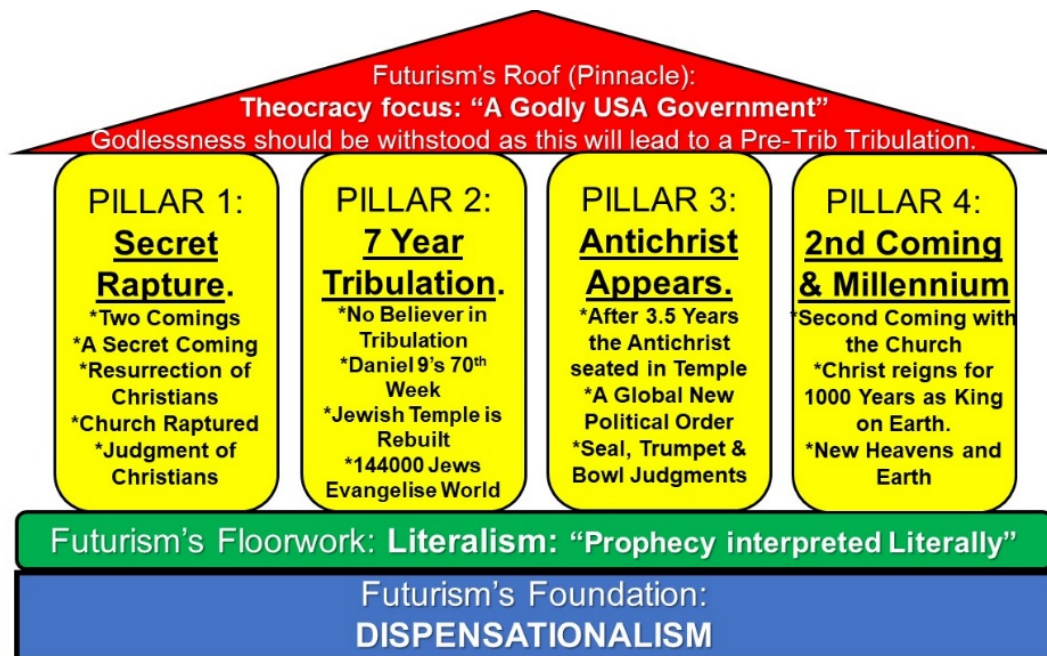


Figure 4.9 The construction of futurism

4.3 FUTURISM ANALYSED

In this section, futurism will be analysed against the criteria of the five-tier analysis model proposed in Chapter 2 to determine whether this interpretation school reveals a theologically adequate hermeneutical approach towards apocalyptic prophecy.

4.3.1 A Christological analysis of futurism

In this section, I aim to determine whether futurism is Christological by utilising the Christological Analysis proposed in Chapter 2.

(i) Christ as Prophet

Considering Christ as Prophet, futurism does reveal Christ as a prophet. LaHaye (2002:114) confirms that “in fulfillment of God’s promise, *the* Prophet had arrived in the person of Jesus Christ” and that “the apostles explicitly identified Jesus as *the* Prophet foretold by Moses (Acts 3:19–23).” LaHaye (2002:114) writes that Christ “himself came as the greatest Prophet of all” as “an individual speaking the very words of God, who alone knows the end from the beginning” (LaHaye, 2002:123). He concludes that Christ “can be trusted as *the* Prophet in matters pertaining to the future!” as Christ “calls himself ‘the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last’ (Rev 22:13)” (LaHaye, 2002:123).

With regard to the Incarnated Christ, futurism does reveal Christ in his incarnation. Concerning the incarnation, LaHaye (2002:99) observes that “the Scripture uses the phrase ‘great with child’ to describe Mary at this momentous time...” LaHaye (2002:99–100) explains that “that child” was not born in Jerusalem, four miles from Bethlehem, because “the prophet, speaking more than five hundred years before Jesus arrived, said that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.” LaHaye (2002:108–109) portrays this incarnated Christ during his ministry as entering “that child-degrading age and said, ‘Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will be no means enter it’ (Mark 10:14–15).” Thus, Christ incarnated revolutionised the fulfillment of God’s kingdom. LaHaye (2002:109) refers to Christ who “took them up in His

arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them” and concludes then that it “is this Jesus who provides the focus of Bible prophecy.”

In dealing with the Crucified Christ, futurism does reveal Christ as the crucified. LaHaye (2002:104) expresses that Christ “as the spotless Lamb of God, slain during Passover almost two thousand years ago” was “sacrificed so that we might enjoy peace with God.” He states that Christ is “the only one who could present a sacrifice worthy of atoning for the sins of the world. This Jesus did, and this is the culmination of Bible prophecy” (LaHaye, 2002:108). This is why he can assure the reader that “the cross no doubt is the most monumental event in history...” (LaHaye, 2002:107). To LaHaye (2002:104), “Bible prophecy authenticates the identity and mission of the Messiah...”

(ii) Christ as Priest

As to the Resurrected Christ, futurism does reveal Christ as the resurrected. LaHaye (2002:108) vocalises that “God best reveals himself in his risen Son,” therefore he maintains that it is “important to focus on the prophecies of Jesus Christ and on his resurrection.” This is also true of the cross, but LaHaye (2002:107) correctly points out that the cross “takes on meaning only because of the resurrection that followed it.” He submits, “Jesus rose from the dead, and in so doing he authenticated both his identity as the Son of God and his role as the Savior of the world” (LaHaye, 2002:107). Therefore, he declares that Christ’s “resurrection proves the truth of his message” which identifies that “[i]t is the resurrection of Christ that makes Christianity possible” (LaHaye, 2002:107–108). LaHaye (2002:109) concludes, “[It] is this Jesus whose resurrection from the dead culminates Bible prophecy.”

Regarding the Victorious Christ, although futurism reveals a victorious Christ over the grave, it is not so of ‘Christ throughout history,’ as will be seen. Also relating to Christ as Priest, futurism does not reveal Christ as Priest.

(iii) Christ as King

Concerning Christ as King, futurism does reveal Christ as King. When LaHaye (2002:109) states that “[i]t is this Jesus who provides the focus of Bible prophecy,” he relates it also to Christ “who is coming again to judge the living and the dead, to reign on the throne of

David, and to present his kingdom to the Father ‘that God may be all in all’ (1 Cor. 15:28).” Hitchcock (2012:417) denotes the kingship of Christ as follows: “When Jesus Christ returns to this earth... After He defeats the armies of the Antichrist at Armageddon and judges the nations, He will establish His Kingdom on the earth.”

Regarding Christ as the Coming Christ, futurism does reveal Christ as the coming Christ. LaHaye (2002:152) postulates, “The return of Jesus is the next major event on the prophetic calendar of God. Nothing else needs to happen before Christ will come in the clouds for his church.” Referring to John 14:1–3, he assures the reader that this “is Jesus’ guarantee that one day he’s coming back for us” (LaHaye, 2002:155). Moreover, he confirms, “Jesus is coming again in power and great glory, just as the Hebrew prophets and the apostles and Jesus himself foretold” (LaHaye, 2002:155). Yet, as a typical futurist, LaHaye (2002:155–156) maintains, “Scripture indicates the second coming of Christ will occur in two phases: the Rapture of the church; and at least seven years later, the Glorious Appearing, when Jesus will come physically to the earth.”

In the context of the Divine Christ, futurism does reveal Christ as Divine. LaHaye (2002:108) writes in the context of prophecy, “[If] Jesus of Nazareth – a natural, wonderful, but merely good man had died on the cross, we would all still be in our sins. A mere man couldn’t die for the sins of all humanity – but God could.” Therefore, Christ was “God himself, in human flesh” (LaHaye, 2002:108). LaHaye (2002:108) then concludes, “‘The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word,’ said the writer to the Hebrews.” He therefore deduces that when “we look at Jesus, Scripture insists, we see God in action” (LaHaye, 2002:108).

About Christ in and through history, futurism does portray Christ in and through history in that Christ is amongst the churches in Revelation 1–3 which it states “to be representative of all churches throughout the church age” (Kessinger, 2004, as cited in LaHaye, 2004:352). Lockyer (1998:20) states that these “seven churches represent the complete church of God during the church age.” However, Figure 4.10 below illustrates that this is just a non-prophetic way of filling up the ‘embarrassing’ and ‘empty’ historical

timeframe:²¹² It is only representative of the church age as futurism does not see it as precise prophecy but as actual letters that “were sent to actual churches in John’s day” (Lockyer, 1998:20).

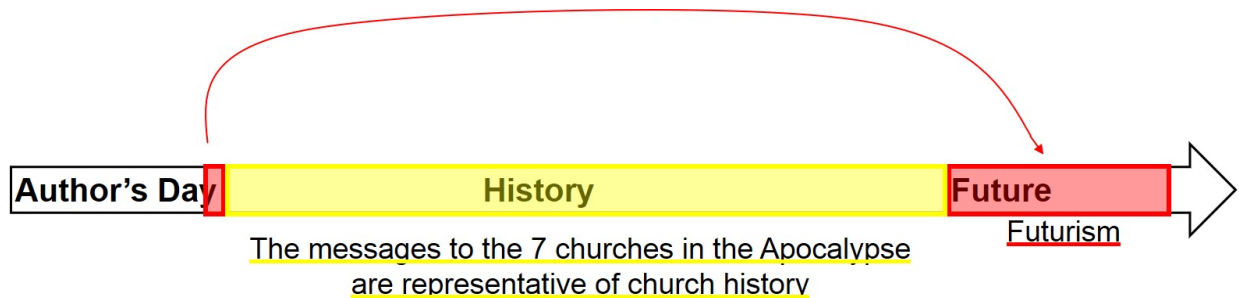


Figure 4.10 The futurist view of the 7 churches filling the historical timeframe

Lockyer (1998:20) further clarifies that John not only wrote “to the seven churches mentioned by name but to all the churches existing at that time (2:23), and all that remain until the rapture.” This is indicative of the very essence of futurism, namely that all of Revelation’s apocalyptic prophecy is yet to be fulfilled in the future. According to Erickson (2013:1118), “dispensationalism holds that all prophetic Scripture applying to the church was fulfilled in the first century.” Since futurism makes the messages to the churches, indicated to be actual eschatological events and not real apocalyptic prophecy, representative of Christ in history to fill this ‘empty’ historical timeframe, it is evident that futurism only somewhat portrays Christ in and through history in its interpretation of apocalyptic prophecy. Erickson (2013:1118) deduces that in the model of futurism, “nothing remains to be fulfilled prior to the rapture,” which in essentiality denotes that futurism sees the “Rapture as an event that could occur at any moment” (Hitchcock, 2012:171). Therefore, Hitchcock (2012:171) advises believers “to be looking for it all the time.” Consequently, this means that no apocalyptic prophetic time has transpired since John’s time until today, as believers from that time to this very moment, according to the futuristic model, could be raptured to heaven at any given instance. This is revealing that

²¹² Please note the ‘History’ part on the timeline. While there is no apocalyptic prophetic fulfillment during this ‘History’ section, futurism does try to fill it with the notion of the messages to the seven churches.

there is no apocalyptic Christ truly in and through history, as time is prophetically frozen in anticipation for the rapture. Once this has occurred, the Apocalypse will start to unfold. In this context, Hitchcock (2012:171), in a very serious tone, relates how one of his friends so strongly believes in the pre-tribulation rapture that he always eats his dessert first...

Yet, all things considered, futurism passes the Christological analysis. LaHaye (2002:97) confirms the futurist view that “Bible prophecy centers on Jesus Christ” as “Jesus Christ is both the goal and the subject of Bible prophecy.”.

4.3.2 An Apocalyptic analysis of futurism

It is critical to interpret apocalyptic prophecy in harmony with the nature of apocalyptic according to its literary type. Futurism, however, contends that Revelation is not apocalyptic. According to Woods (2004, as cited in LaHaye, 2004:27), some dispensational interpreters do categorise certain prophetic books of the Bible, such as Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation as apocalyptic literature, simply because they reveal God’s future prophetic programme. Acknowledging some apocalyptic characteristics evident in Revelation, he still maintains that the book displays more differences than similarities with apocalyptic literature. Thus, he believes it to be general prophecy rather than apocalyptic prophecy (Woods, 2004, as cited in LaHaye, 2004:27,30).

However, this is not the actual reason for rejecting Revelation as apocalyptic. Woods (2004, as cited in LaHaye, 2004:27) grants that categorising Revelation as apocalyptic challenges the dispensational view and would change futurism’s hermeneutical principles for interpreting the book. Futurism therefore rejects Revelation being apocalyptic as it does away with the foundation and floorwork of its hermeneutic. Hence, futurists simply dismiss it as “genre-dependent hermeneutics” (Ryrie, 2016, as cited in Bingham, 2016:74).

Woods (2004, as cited in LaHaye, 2004:28) tries to argue that “categorizing Revelation as apocalyptic literature moves the interpreter away from a literal understanding... toward a symbolic interpretation,” which “opens the door to historicism and preterism.” Thus, since apocalyptic does not fit the futurist model, it cannot be apocalyptic. This is regressive reasoning. Many futurist scholars, for instance, believe various numbers in

Revelation to be literal, such as the 1 260 days or 42 months; therefore, they assert that Revelation cannot be apocalyptic and thus symbolic (Woods, 2004, as cited in LaHaye, 2004:28). Woods (2004, as cited in LaHaye, 2004:30) observes that futurism, which can only function on a literal basis, demands that Revelation should be interpreted “just as we would any other prophecy. We should use the same literal, grammatical, historical method that we normally use for interpreting Scripture.” Evidently, apocalyptic and futurism are irreconcilable and thus futurism fails the Apocalyptic analysis.

4.3.3 A prophetic image analysis of futurism

Apocalyptic prophecy is filled with prophetic imagery which should be interpreted carefully and correctly. I will now evaluate futurism according to the Prophetic Image Analysis developed in Chapter two, as futurism does acknowledge the use of prophetic imagery within Revelation.

By its very system, which is literalistic, futurism renders it mostly impossible for a figure to be fluid and to vary according to context, but rather regards meanings and figures as fixed. Its dispensationalism model demands literal consistency in imagery. For instance, because “the same symbol of the woman used in Revelation 12:1 is also used in Genesis 37:9–11 to depict Israel,” it is argued that “the woman of Revelation 12” should be “symbolic of Israel” (Woods, 2004, as cited in LaHaye, 2004:31). Yet, the challenge would remain for futurism and its unbendable system which limits images to be fluid to explain the same imagery of a woman that is used for the Church in Ephesians 5:23–27 and 2 Corinthians 11:2. A further challenge within this system is the insistence that all given prophecy should be precisely and literally fulfilled.

As already established, futurism does not recognise Revelation as apocalyptic, and thus not symbolic by nature. As for viewing Revelation as symbolic, unless the context denotes it to be taken literally, futurism argues for the exact opposite. Woods (2004, as cited in LaHaye, 2004:30) asserts that, according to the literal approach, Revelation’s content is taken in its ordinary sense until some obvious clue appears in the text that alerts the interpreter to figurative or symbolic language. This results in the obvious apocalyptic impossibility to understand the nature and reasons for the symbol used.

As futurism naturally takes prophetic elements literally, it does use logical indicators to help with identifying symbols; hence, it does at times recognise the source of some symbols. For instance, Woods (2004, as cited in LaHaye, 2004:31) correctly makes the link between some figurative language in Revelation and identical figurative language in the Old Testament, such as the leopard, lion, and bear in Revelation 13:2 which are also used in Daniel 7 to depict nations. As this indicates that John is employing symbolic language, Woods (2004, as cited in LaHaye, 2004:31) rightly concludes that “the leopard, lion, and bear represent nations in Revelation 13 just as they did in Daniel 7.”

Futurism does try to respect those symbols that it estimates as symbols within its relationship to the context and main theme. It is an endeavour, though, as futurism does not respect apocalyptic. Woods (2004, as cited in LaHaye, 2004:31), who grants that figurative language sometimes includes an interpretation in the immediate context, also admits that if “something is interpreted for the reader, then the thing interpreted is obviously a symbol.” As an example, Woods (2004, as cited in LaHaye, 2004:31) concludes that the “woman in Revelation 17 is obviously a symbol because the immediate context interprets her to be a city (17:18).” Yet, since futurism does not acknowledge apocalyptic, it incorrectly interprets very obvious symbolic images, like that of time, as literal. See section 4.2.4 for a discussion on futurism’s fatal interpretation of prophetic time as literal.

Futurism wants to utilise the immediate context to justify when it will accept a prophetic element as symbol or not.²¹³ Yet, such an immediate context can only be correctly interpreted in the greater context of the book and its literary context. Seeing that futurism rejects Revelation as apocalyptic literature, it cannot successfully consider symbolism within its immediate context.

Based on the above, futurism clearly fails the prophetic image analysis.

²¹³ Woods (2004, as cited in LaHaye, 2004:30) explains, “[T]he interpreter takes Revelation’s content in its ordinary sense until he encounters some obvious clue in the text that alerts him to figurative or symbolic language.”

4.3.4 An exegetical analysis of futurism

Exegesis lies at the heart of the approach of any model of biblical interpretation. This section analyses futurism against five critical questions, derived from a key eschatological bible passage.

(i) Does this interpretation view the Parousia to be literal, real and observable?

This question is based on the exegesis of 2 Thessalonians 2:1 which refers to the *Parousia*. Futurists, however, list it as the secret rapture (Hitchcock, 2012:150; LaHaye, 1999:99), which is quite the opposite of a literal, real and observable event. This secret rapture is described as a “snatch away” (LaHaye, 2002:156) of the Church “as a robber seizes a prize” (LaHaye, 1973:76), “[q]uickly and invisibly, unperceived by the world” (Silver, 1914:260), “veiled to the human eye” (Roberts, 1967:34).

It has already been established in section 4.2.3 that there is no biblical data for a secret rapture, which will uphold the fact that the Parousia is literal, real and observable in this passage. Gentry (1999:210–211) supports this by referring to Rosenthal, a prominent and respected advocate for evangelising the Jews, who indicated that he could no longer believe in a pre-tribulational rapture, since he could find no biblical support for it. Studying Walvoord’s 50 arguments for the secret rapture, Rosenthal comments that no biblical text was cited that explicitly teaches pretribulation rapturism and that Walvoord himself concluded that the question regarding the rapture is determined by ecclesiology (the doctrine of the Church) rather than eschatology (the doctrine of the last things). Therefore, Rosenthal infers that there simply is no explicit exegetical evidence for pretribulation rapturism.²¹⁴

It is thus evident that sufficient exegetical evidence does not exist for a rapture that is unobservable and secret.

²¹⁴ Rosenthal, M. 1990. *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church: A New Understanding of the Rapture, the Tribulation, and the Second Coming*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson. (See page 280).

(ii) Does this interpretation view the Parousia as being preceded by the coming and revelation of the Antichrist?

Considering that exegetically a secret rapture is improbable, and that it is part of the second coming as a supposedly first phase, the whole futurist understanding of the *Parousia* is exegetically flawed. Although futurists may argue that 2 Thessalonians 2:1–3 refers to the rapture and the glorious coming separately in these verses, textually it is impossible. While futurists agree that “the coming (*parousia*) of our Lord Jesus Christ” in verse 1 refers to the secret rapture, some would argue that “the day of Christ” in verse 2 refers to the glorious coming as to prevent the logical sequence in verse 3. The coming of the Antichrist prior to the *parousia* of verse 1 (said to refer to the secret rapture), however, invalidates the secret rapture. “The day of Christ” in verse 2 relates directly to “the coming (*parousia*) of our Lord Jesus Christ” in verse 1. This is noted when these texts are considered,

Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. (2 Thessalonians 2:1–2).

With this established, Paul states, “[T]hat Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition” (2 Thessalonians 2:3). According to Paul, the Antichrist’s coming will precede the *parousia* of verse 1 which is claimed to be the secret rapture. This is the exact opposite of futurism’s model where the rapture first transpires and the coming of the Antichrist follows.

Based on the above, it is clear that this interpretation does not view the *Parousia* in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–3 as being preceded by the coming and revelation of the Antichrist.

(iii) Does this interpretation view the coming of the Antichrist to be literal, real and observable?

Seeing that section 4.2.5 already indicated that futurism adheres to a coming of a literal, real and observable Antichrist figure, a definitive ‘yes’ would be sufficient to this question.

(iv) Does this interpretation view the Parousia as destroying the Antichrist?

Again, considering that exegetically a secret rapture is improbable, and that it is considered by futurists as part of the second coming as a supposedly first phase, the whole futurist understanding of the *parousia* is exegetically flawed. Futurists could not reason that the *parousia* will be destroying the Antichrist, as this would demand that the *parousia* will be at all times one event, as is scripturally indicated. While futurists want to maintain that the same *parousia* is one event happening in two stages, the contrary has been shown in section 4.2.3.

Hence, since futurism contends for an unobservable *parousia* in the beginning of the passage, which precedes the Antichrist, this hermeneutic cannot exegetically argue for a *parousia* that destroys the Antichrist.

(v) Does this interpretation view God to be in control of end events?

Futurism does view God as in control of the rapture and the great appearing, the events just before and after the seven years. However, when futurists refer to end events, they usually refer to the events described in the book of Revelation, namely the events that will transpire during the seven years of tribulation. In this regard, the view is that Satan and his protégé, the Antichrist, will be in control of end events on this earth, and not God.

Based on these five questions, it is apparent that futurism fails the exegetical analysis.

4.3.5 A practical relevance analysis of futurism

The Practical Relevance Analysis developed in Chapter 2 will be utilised for this last analysis of futurism.

Futurism would probably offer hope in one's situation as it looks forward with hope to the future. Further futurism may help one make sense of life as it inspires one with hope. The possibility also exists that the outflow of the eschatology of futurism, which calls for political activism against liberalism, may tend to inspire. While further sense may be garnered that God is in control of the present, eschatological stress can diminish sense in the presence with the outlook of an immediate future of a seven-year tribulation where

Satan and the Antichrist will be in control if one is left behind by the secret rapture. Hitchcock (2012:258) insensitively highlights this by stating, “[If] you ever do figure out who the Antichrist is, I’ve got bad news: you’ve been left behind.”

Depending on your perspective, futurism can motivate towards spirituality. Whether fear based or not, people are encouraged not to be left behind and thus to accept Christ. In the face of the looming tribulation, LaHaye (1999:119) stresses, “[If] you do not believe... we urge you to confess your sins directly to Christ and invite Him into your life...” With Christians, LaHaye (1999:120) pleads, “[S]urrender your life to Him and cooperate with Him in making you holy.” LaHaye (1999:115) emphasises that no one knows how long before the tribulation and states, “An imminent Rapture moves us to greater consecration...” (LaHaye, 1999:116). Yet strangely, he observes that “[f]rankly, that is why two hundred and fifty prophecy scholars, authors, and teachers joined me in founding the Pre-Trib Research Center seven years ago, to help popularize the biblical teaching that Christ could come at any time. We do not see any of the other Rapture theories having such an effect on the body of Christ” (LaHaye, 1999:117).

Futurism may inspire the believer to ethical living if they sincerely hope in Christ and his coming, even if it is in the context of the rapture, for they still believe in the greater eschatological themes.

The outflow of futurism leads to a goal of establishing a godly government where Christians could see themselves as “builders of the kingdom of God on earth” (Migliore, 2004:350). Futurism is thus highly unlikely to bring eschatological relevance to the believer in the eschatological scheme of futurism. We cannot be, recreate, imitate or supplant God’s coming reign and kingdom. Migliore (2004:350) clarifies, “Understanding the relationship of Christian hope and Christian ethics in this way is as distant from the scriptural witness as it is the opposite view,” which is “a purely otherworldly hope that no longer has any interest in this world and the possibilities of its transformation.” These are true extremes that some Christians fall into, enthused by God’s hope to portray his reign to the world. Some succumb to the extreme of thinking they can establish God’s reign and kingdom in this world themselves, while others are overcome by the extreme of

believing they belong to God's otherworldly kingdom and have no responsibility towards and in this world, and should just wait for the rapture to take them away from the planet.

Migliore (2004:351) explains, "We are a pilgrim people," and there is a "homeland," a "better country" than we presently inhabit and that our hearts seek (Heb. 11:14,16). Believers can never equate their discipleship efforts and achievements, which are by the grace of God, with what Karl Barth calls the 'great hope', the 'great righteousness', the 'great peace', which refers to "the reign of God that comes as a gift from God" (Migliore, 2004:351).

Considering all of the above, it can be deduced that futurism may be practically relevant, differing from person to person.

4.4 CONCLUSION

Unlike preterism, futurism can be commended for taking the future or second coming seriously. It is a hermeneutic that determinedly views eschatology as a biblical surety. This translates that futurism deems eschatology truly eschatologically, as its paradigm is futuristic.

Futurism can further be commended for its Christocentric focus. While many eschatologies and interpretive systems tend to focus more on the specific end events alone, futurism manages to keep Christ in focus. Another positive aspect of futurism and the worldview it brings is its practical relevancy in that it may give people hope in situations that can seem hopeless. Futurism speaks directly to the psyche of most people who wants to know what the future hold. It also admits the worsening condition of the world and the longing within people's hearts for deliverance and the coming eschaton. Thus it presents the hope of coming parousia.

The challenge of futurism is its highly questionable premise of dispensationalism. It posits physical Israel against the Church in constructing all prophetic interpretations regarding the nation of Israel and her enemies to be literally fulfilled in the unknown future. Coupled with this premise is the floorwork of literalism which interprets all prophecy, even apocalyptic, literally. This elaborate, fascinating eschatological structure is so constructed

that it captivates the imagination of millions in its description. Still, futurism in its very approach cannot be judged to be either sensational or factual, because, as Gregg (2013:43) expounds, “[Futurism] cannot be verified or falsified,” as all its interpretations “have not yet occurred.” However, futurists assert that they will never “be embarrassed by future developments, since they believe that they will be raptured before any of the predicted events occur” (Gregg, 2013:43). This leads to the question how probable futurism may be. Furthermore, this chapter’s mapping of its teachings showed it to be questionable in some instances.

The critical evaluation of futurism in this chapter has led to specific conclusions. In the analysis of futurism, it was found to be Christological. It was also found that futurism ironically does not recognise the Apocalypse as apocalyptic, and thus interprets its prophecies according to its literalistic system. Furthermore, futurism failed the prophetic image analysis as it favours its literalistic floorwork. In addition, it was found that futurism cannot be exegetically substantiated. Yet in the practical relevance analysis of futurism it was found that, differing from person to person, futurism can provide much needed hope and sense to people’s present situation.

To summarise, Chapter 4 firstly provided a detailed definition of futurism and secondly mapped the main futurist teachings. Finally, futurism was critically analysed by means of the analysis model proposed in Chapter 2. The next chapter will present a critical evaluation of historicism.

CHAPTER 5: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF HISTORICISM

This chapter explores historicism, the last one of the three apocalyptic interpretation schools studied in this research. The aim is to firstly define this hermeneutic in more detail, map its key teachings, and ultimately to evaluate its validity in terms of the five-tier analysis model introduced in Chapter 2.

5.1 HISTORICISM DEFINED

The historicist apocalyptic approach will be more clearly and extensively defined as I endeavour to answer the question: *What is the theological reasoning behind historicism and what will be the outcome if this hermeneutic is critically analysed?*

5.1.1 Introduction

Historicists view apocalyptic prophecy as literal fulfilments in real events, sometimes with actual dates prompted by prophetic time. This bears the predisposed potential to succumb to date setting of the end or eschaton, if not prudent and careful.

Arasola (1990:1) informs that the “centuries-old,²¹⁵ well-established historical method of prophetic exposition” lost dominance in favour of either dispensationalist futurism or the more scholarly preterism after the Great Awakening across all denominational lines in the mid-19th century. This movement created an excitement of the hastening eschaton which brought many to determine an exact date for Christ’s coming. After the date had passed and people were bitterly disappointed,²¹⁶ the historicist method was largely discarded (Arasola, 1990:13-18).

Besides this momentous shift away from historicism, those who remained²¹⁷ with its utilisation were greatly influenced by these events and thus determined not to repeat such

²¹⁵ Mathews (2012:93) says that “until the mid-nineteenth century, historicism was the primary hermeneutic for Christians. Prior to that, it was the impelling hermeneutic of the Reformation.”

²¹⁶ To date, this disappointment of 1843/1844 is still used to discredit historicism.

²¹⁷ Mainly Adventists, of which many became Seventh-day Adventists later, held to the historicist method, besides some local protestant congregation here and there or rare scholar.

date-setting. Yet, with a hermeneutic which interprets prophetic imagery and time with real events and dates, the vulnerability will always exist for interpreters to stray into this dreadful area. Consequently, throughout the last century up to date, there have been individuals²¹⁸ subscribing to the historicist method who have succumbed to date setting. A leading figure, Larry Wilson, serves as an example. He started in the late 1980s to predict the end to take place in the 90s. Resulting from his proposed dates for the coming end, he was banned from teaching in Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) official Conference Churches, which eventually led to his departure from the SDA Church. His failed predictions also affected his move from a historicist approach towards a more futurist position²¹⁹ to keep his followers excited and engaged. In his popular book, *Warning! Revelation is about to be Fulfilled*, with close to a million copies published, he set very specific dates. From the first edition in 1988, he got bolder with each edition in setting dates. In the third edition, Wilson (1991:133) writes, “I’m impressed that four Bible themes seem to converge on or about 1994.” He admits he “received a lot of scoffing for even mentioning 1994” (Wilson, 1991:133). Yet, Wilson (1991:133) insisted, “I am not time-setting” nor “do I know what date our Lord will return.” But with the excitement he stirred and growing followers garnered, his time-setting became bolder to the extent of publishing in the fifth edition that he believes “the Great Tribulation will begin during 1994 or 1995 and terminate around 1998 with the second coming of Jesus” (Wilson, 1994:1). He (1994:124) mentions that this tribulation would commence in “the Spring of 1994” and would run for “1260 days”, ending in the Autumn of 1997. Needless to say, in his later editions these dates were removed. Wilson (1991:9) states, “I find fault with the historical view of Revelation” as “historicism teaches that the bulk of Revelation has been fulfilled.”

Much more recently, historicist Jeff Pippenger also set a date that made headlines worldwide. Pippenger is a former Seventh-day Adventist whose membership was removed in 2015 in response to his far-fetched apocalyptic teachings in public. The Arkansas-Louisiana Conference stated the reason for the removal of his membership in

²¹⁸ Inside and outside of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

²¹⁹ Marty Purvis, friend of Larry and co-worker for more than 25 years, telephonically confirmed to me on 1 July 2020, that Larry “used a combination of both historicism and futurism.”

their official communication as follows: “Mr. Pippenger has been going around the North America Division and Europe teaching a theology that has left confusion, discord, controversy, and division as its fruit.”²²⁰ He predicted on 21 June 2020 in a full-page newspaper advertisement that Islam would detonate a huge bomb in Nashville, Tennessee, on 18 July 2020, according to prophecy. This made waves through most major media companies globally, from TIME which proclaimed “Stoking Hate Against Muslims”²²¹ and “basing its evidence off of ‘Bible prophecy’”²²² to Aljazeera News which investigated Pippenger’s ministry and reported that “the group’s ministry warns of so-called end-of-the-world Bible prophecies whose fulfillment ‘is no longer future – for it is taking place before our eyes.’”²²³ After initially also reporting about this incident, the New York Times reported in a second article that the Tennessee Newspaper fired its advertising manager “After Anti-Muslim Ad”.²²⁴

This phenomenon of individuals claiming to apply historicism when yielding to date setting has been greatly used in trying to discredit historicism at large. However, one cannot base such an argument on the misinterpretations of a few individuals dispersed throughout time. The tragedy of Waco,²²⁵ with cult leader David Koresh, serves as another example where historicism was discredited based on an individual’s radical ideas. While opposers of historicism wanted to project this onto the SDA Church, Haus (1993:30) clarifies that

²²⁰ Seventh-day Adventist Church 2015, *Official Letter*, Seventh-day Adventist Church Arkansas-Louisiana Conference, viewed 1 July 2020, <<https://www.dropbox.com/s/ogy5vutyqry5bz4/Pippenger%2C%20Jeff.pdf?dl=0>>

²²¹ Mansoor, S 2020, *Tennessee Newspaper Criticized for Stoking Hate Against Muslims After Publishing 'Horrific' Full Page Ad*, Time, viewed 23 June 2020, <<https://time.com/5856809/tennessean-islamophobic-ad-muslims/>>

²²² Mansoor, S 2020, *Tennessee Newspaper Criticized for Stoking Hate Against Muslims After Publishing 'Horrific' Full Page Ad*, Time, viewed 23 June 2020, <<https://time.com/5856809/tennessean-islamophobic-ad-muslims/>>

²²³ Aljazeera 2020, *Tennessee newspaper investigating apocalyptic, 'Islamophobic' ad*, Aljazeera, viewed 23 2020, <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/06/tennessee-newspaper-investigating-apocalyptic-islamophobic-ad-200622140606425.html>>

²²⁴ Ortiz, A 2020, *Tennessee Newspaper Fires Advertising Manager After Anti-Muslim Ad*, New York Times, viewed 23 June 2020, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/22/business/media/tennessean-ad-manager-fired.html>>

²²⁵ This tragedy was captured in a captivating TV series on Netflix in 2020: Dowdle, D & Dowdle JE 2018, *Waco*, Netflix, viewed 15 July 2020, <<https://www.netflix.com/title/80228244>>

long before this whole ordeal, Vernon Howell (David Koresh's real name) had become so 'angry' with the Church for rejecting his 'prophetic views' that "eventually the local congregation had to disfellowship him." After involving himself with a questionable religious group, he turned it into a full-fledged cult, eventually claiming that he is "a prophet" and "the rider on the white horse" in reference to Revelation 6 (Haus, 1993:85), eventually concluding that he, "Koresh, must be the lamb" of God (Haus, 1993:90). Like the Church,²²⁶ which had nothing to do with this lunacy by someone not even of the Church, can neither be held responsible nor blamed, historicism cannot be discredited for a person who started out with historicism but eventually rejected historicism as it did not fit with his prophetic narrative and motive. This is mentioned, as studies²²⁷ exist that offer this incident as proof enough to discredit historicism. A theological hermeneutic cannot be dismissed on the grounds of some individual's erratic behaviour or teachings.²²⁸ A theological hermeneutic should be critically evaluated on its own merit.

5.1.2 Broad definition

Granted that "the preterist view also focuses on history at least from the contemporary reader's vantage point" (Patterson, 2012:28), it needs to be established what differentiates historicism from preterism. While proponents of futurism have criticised historicism for being only a modified version of preterism, Patterson (2012:28) explains the historicist view as a "continuous-historical" approach, "a panorama of church history

²²⁶ Haus (1993:31) quotes the SDA Church's statement in response to the Waco Tragedy, "Although the Seventh-day Adventist Church has no affiliation with the Branch Davidians or any other cult, our hearts go out to those who have lost loved ones in the Waco, Texas, tragedy. As compassionate, peace-loving people, our prayers are with these families."

²²⁷ See *The Ashes of Waco. An Investigation*. 1995. By Dick J. Reavis. USA: First Syracuse University Press.

²²⁸ History has repeatedly shown that such individuals are enclosed in their own little theological paradigm not open to dialogue nor willing to be scrutinised. SDA scholar Paulien (2006, as cited in Reid, 2006:253) in the context of Apocalyptic interpretation offers the following advice, if heeded will negate such erratic "theological" behaviour, "Give careful attention to the evaluation of peers... especially those who disagree with you or who are competent in the original languages and the tools of exegesis. ...A good antidote to self-deception is to subject one's own understandings constantly to the review of others who are making equally rigorous efforts to understand those texts. Those who saturate themselves in the big picture of the Bible that comes from broad reading of the clear texts, corrected by vigorous listening to others, will gain two great benefits as a result. They will stay out of the pit of sensationalism and of date-setting."

from John's time to the second advent." Therefore, while preterism is only concerned with the history close to the author's day, historicism, in contrast, sees apocalyptic reaching all the way to the *parousia*.

Morris (1984:17) describes historicism as a "forecast" of history, while Keener (2000:27) portrays apocalyptic prophecy as providing a "map of history from its own day until Jesus' future return." Historicism is further defined by Erdman (1929:22) as apocalyptic prophecy revealing "in advance outstanding movements and events in human history from the days of Rome to the end of the world." More specifically, Keener (2000:27) clarifies that the historicist view of Revelation sees it as "church history".

In similar fashion, MacArthur (1999:10) details that "[t]he *historicist* approach finds in Revelation a record of the sweep of church history," while Macdonald (2016:2456) portrays it as "a panorama of church history from the apostolic era until the consummation." As the Apocalypse starts out with the image of Christ amid the seven golden candlesticks representing his Church, historicism "sees it as a symbolic prophecy of the entire course of the church's history from the first century until the end of time" (Cairns, 2002:211). Therefore, historicism is also known as the "*church-historical* interpretation" (Michaels, 1997:23). Miller (1991:12) suggests it to be termed "the historical view" as in its interpretation it "parallels events of history" to the specific prophecy. This historical interpretation would then also include "the major movements of Christian history, most of which have been fulfilled up to the time of the commentator," according to Beale (1999:46). This historical application expands "in broad outline the history of western Europe" (Morris, 1984:17), even "as a prophetic survey of the history of the world" (Michaels, 1997:22), further "stretching right on until the second coming of Christ" (Morris, 1984:17). Reed (2016:4) portrays that "historicists see Bible prophecy undergoing fulfillment throughout history," while Miller (1991:12) concisely summarises historicism as "the symbolic visions" of apocalyptic which "proceeds through history sequentially." In summary, historicism sees the fulfillment of apocalyptic prophecy through the whole sequential sweep of history, from the author's day to the *parousia*, with a specific emphasis on the main epochs of Christian history.

Figure 5.1 provides a schematic presentation of historicism in the form of a timeline. As mentioned in previous chapters, the three elements crucial to any prophecy are the author's day, history and the future. The figure below highlights in red where on the timeline, in terms of these elements, historicism places the fulfillment of the prophecy.

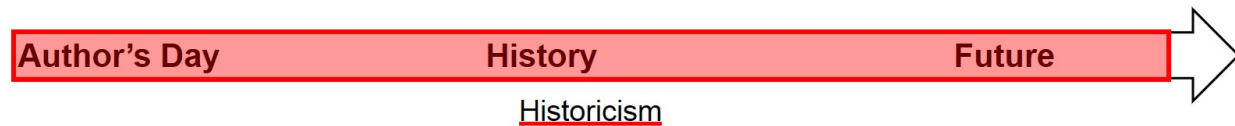


Figure 5.1 Schematic presentation of historicism

Figure 5.1 clearly illustrates the historicist view of the relevancy of the text to an audience that stretches throughout history to the *parousia* or end in the future.

5.1.3 Reformation historicism

As a “widely older interpretation” (Michaels, 1997:22), historicism “was the impelling hermeneutic of the Reformation” (Mathews, 2012:93). Froom (1982:22–23) states that “[f]rom the Reformation stems a long line of prophetic expositions which molded Protestant thinking for centuries after their day.” The author confirms that this prophetic exposition model “came to be known as the Historical School of prophetic interpretation...” (Froom, 1982:22–23).

One of the greatest historicist scholars defending historicism in the nineteenth century, Edward Bishop Elliott, called historicism ‘the *Protestant continues Historic Scheme of Interpretation*’ (Elliott, 1862:563), while famous historicist proponent Guinness (1879:98) termed it the ‘Protestant historical system of apocalyptic interpretation’. During the past ±400 years, protestants globally maintained and adhered to historicism as their apocalyptic hermeneutic. Therefore, scholars like Elliott refer to historicism as a *Protestant* or *Reformation* hermeneutic. Elliott (1862:563) defines this reformation hermeneutic as “that which regards the Apocalypse as a prefiguration in detail of the chief events affecting the Church and Christendom, whether secular or ecclesiastical, from St. John’s time to the consummation...” To confirm historicism as a protestant hermeneutic,

Elliott (1862:563) writes that it “was early embraced, as we say, by the Waldenses, Wickliffites, and Hussites; then adopted with fuller light by the chief reformers, German, Swiss, French, and English of the 16th century; and thence transmitted downwards uninterruptedly, even to the present time.” According to Gregg (2013:34), the “list of the luminaries of the past who took this view would have to include John Wycliffe, John Knox, William Tyndale, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, Philip Melanchthon, Sir Isaac Newton, Jan Huss...”

The question could be posed why the Reformers were historicists. Besides the fact that “until the mid-nineteenth century, historicism was the primary hermeneutic for Christians” (Mathews, 2012:93), the historicist hermeneutic propelled the protest of the Reformers as they maintained *Sola Scriptura* for their protestation of the doctrines of the Latin Church and their eventual egression from its membership. Froom (1982, vol 2:9,10) writes how the Renaissance helped ignite the Reformation,

It included a rediscovery of the past, but it also ushered in a new concept of philosophy and religion, and marked a rebirth of the arts and sciences... It emerged from the encompassing decay of church and empire, and resulted in the fuller development of modern nationalities and languages. It liberated the minds of men... challenging the control of the church over secular matters. The concept of universal monarchy and indivisible Christendom, incorporated in the Holy Roman Empire and the secularized Roman church, had lost its grip, and was gradually supplanted by new theories of church and state.

The ever-growing paradigm of thinking for oneself sparked a theological revival. However, the Reformation was “more than a spiritual revival, for it brought into being a new ecclesiastical system, establishing the Reformed churches in separation from Rome” (Froom, 1982, vol 2:350). This movement of “renovation and liberation” spread “from the individual to the group, then to the church, and finally to the nation” (Froom, 1982, vol 2:350). It was in this environment that the historicist school of apocalyptic interpretation proved invaluable as from “the very first, and throughout the Reformation century, the movement was energized and aided by the prophetic Word” (Froom, 1982, vol 2:353). According to the historicist hermeneutic, the Roman Church and its abuses were

prophesied about in the Apocalypse, which gave credence to the movement. Therefore, the historicist interpretive scheme determined and informed the Reformers' "action, and led them to protest against Rome with undaunted courage" (Froom, 1982, vol 2:353).

Beale (1999:46), in reference to these protestant scholars of previous centuries, reports that the "majority of these commentators have understood the seals, trumpets, and bowls as unfolding successive events of history in general chronological order." Reformation historicism as a classical historicist view therefore sees apocalyptic prophecy mostly moving according to the "continues-historical straight line interpretation" (Gane, 2012:16), which "identifies the fulfillment of Revelation's prophecies in the period of history from Jesus' day to His second coming" (Gane, 2012:16). This type of historicism would see "the successive sections of Revelation as comprising a continuous line of events occurring in order throughout the Christian era" (Gane, 2012:16).

5.1.4 SDA historicism

While "[t]hrough the ages several different methods of interpreting Daniel and Revelation have been proposed" (Shea, 2003:22), Gulley (2016:22) highlights that of the three main interpretation schools, historicism "takes history more seriously than the other two views." The reason for this, according to Gulley (2016:22), is that if "preterists focus on the past and futurists on the future, historicists unite the past with the future through the ongoing history in the book," seeing prophecy "as being fulfilled through the course of human history beginning at the time of the prophets who wrote them" (Shea, 2003:22). In the same vein, Davidson (2000:44) explains that the "preterists must say that prophecy failed, and the futurists must posit a gap where none exists. But the historicists can be consistent with the whole sweep of the prophetic time prophecies, moving from the prophet's day to the eschaton," for historicism "takes the full evidence of the book most seriously" (Dybdahl, 2010:1658).

Historicism, as understood by Adventists, is the understanding that apocalyptic prophecy has a "cosmic range that begins in the writer's own day and takes the reader down to the end" to the "establishment of God's eternal kingdom..." (Majola, 2010:76–77). In similar fashion, Paulien (2006, as cited in Reid, 2006:249) notes that the "historicist method

understands the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation to meet their fulfillments in historical time through a sequence of events” in “the flow of history” (Dybdahl, 2010:1658) with “the progressive and continuous fulfillment of prophecy, in unbroken²²⁹ sequence, from Daniel’s day and the time of John, on down to the Second Advent and the end of age” (Froom, 1982:22–23), providing “a divinely inspired, descriptive overview and evaluation of some of the most theologically significant events” (Shea, 1992:68–69), and seeing “the hand of Divine Providence moving across the ages, overruling events to bring about the fulfillment of God’s purposes” (Holbrook, 1983:21) and “the establishment of God’s eternal kingdom” (Holbrook, 1983:21). But while apocalyptic prophecy is thus interpreted from the encompassing “sweep of history from the times of Daniel and John” (Holbrook, 1983:21) to the coming *parousia*, it is still only as “history progresses and the time of the fulfillment comes” that “the sequences and their historical fulfillment become more apparent²³⁰ (John 13:19; 14:29)” (Paulien 2006, as cited in Reid, 2006:268). Therefore, it should be remembered that “it is only from the perspective of the Second Coming that history will speak with perfect clarity...” (Paulien, 2006, as cited in Reid, 2006:268). In the words of LaRondelle (2007:182), “The apocalyptic prophecies will be fulfilled and understood only gradually, as history moves forward. A progressive fulfillment releases a progressive understanding.”

It should be noted that this SDA historicist position, according to Shea (1992:68–69), is “the ‘continuous’ historical school of prophetic interpretation,” also “known as the ‘continuous historical’ view” (Holbrook, 1983:21), or more accurately, as the “continuous-historical recapitulationist” (Gane, 2012:16) interpretation. It is termed such as it sees “the sections of Revelation as paralleling each other, each of them reaching from the time of Christ to His second advent” (Gane, 2012:16). This recapitulation refers to “the seven churches, the seven seals, and the seven trumpets,” which “cover essentially the same

²²⁹ LaRondelle (2010:83) questions “whether Froom did not press his definition of the fulfilments in an ‘unbroken’ sequence *beyond* what divine revelation allows.”

²³⁰ Froom (1982:15) points out that “prophecy has been progressively understood just as fast as history has fulfilled it, step by step, down through the passing centuries.”

periods of history from different perspectives” (Gane, 2012:16), or the same time periods of Daniel chapters 2, 7, 8 and 9, and 11.

While individual SDA scholars have been proposing an update to this hermeneutical position (which will be perused in the next section), Adventist theologians and administrators explored the theme of eschatology from an Adventist perspective at the 4th International Bible Conference in Rome, June 11–20, 2018.²³¹ Here they reaffirmed the historicist position in the following consensus statement:

We affirm that the apocalyptic books of Daniel and Revelation are foundational for the understanding of biblical eschatology and that the historicist method is the proper approach to interpreting them.²³²

5.1.5 SDA historicist variants

When the writings of Adventist historicists are studied, the glaring reality of inconsistency presents itself. Treiyer, for example, a thorough historicist who has shown himself to be well able with regard to this hermeneutic, inconsistently maintains that the timeline under the 6th trumpet of Revelation could be starting at both of two different time periods in history (Treiyer, 2005:333–347). Similarly, Maxwell (1985:263), also commenting on the 6th trumpet, argues for 1453 as starting date for its time prophecy; yet, two pages later, “to turn now to other events marking the beginning and ending of the 391 years” he adds an additional starting date, 1449. One cannot have two different sets of events for the same time prophecy. It is inconsistent with the principle within historicism that there can be dual fulfillment²³³ of event or time within apocalyptic prophecy. In this regard, Davidson

²³¹ Biblical Research Institute 2018, *Fourth International Bible Conference*, Biblical Research Institute, viewed 29 June 2020, <<https://adventistbiblicalresearch.org/content/fourth-international-bible-conference-0>>

²³² Biblical Research Institute 2018, *Consensus Statement*, Biblical Research Institute, viewed 29 June 2020, <https://adventistbiblicalresearch.org/sites/default/files/Statement_Draft%20004a%20FMH1%20%28Consensus%20Statement%29.pdf>

²³³ This premise was made official by the SDA Church in response to Ford’s proposals (Spangler, 1980:21.44). In fact theologically and exegetically spoken, “[a]ny principle of interpretation that permits any prophecy to mean many things is not a helpful tool” (Spangler, 1980:21).

(2007, as cited in Du Preez, 2007:58) clearly states that “unlike classical prophecy, specific apocalyptic passages refer to only one phase of fulfillment for each prophetic symbol, time element, or other feature” since “there is an unbroken historical progression from the prophet’s day to the end of time.” If historicists maintain that there is only one fulfillment for a time prophecy within apocalyptic, then there could not be more than one date.

Recently, Adventist historian Adam Fenner, currently the Director of the Adventist Learning Community department of the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, wrote an article on the division’s official webpage promoting a principle contrary to a fundamental singular interpretation, suggesting multiple fulfillments of apocalyptic prophecy. He argues that “these prophecies may have double applications or interpretations.”²³⁴ Froom (1944:26) proves how the prophetic periods in the 6th trumpet, as following the year-day principle, “is overwhelmingly supported by the historical school of apocalyptic interpretation with a galaxy of over one hundred precedents in four nations and two continents.” Froom (1944:24–25) charts this list of interpreters over the centuries, even including Luther, thereby well establishing this historicist position. More recently, Rodríguez (2012:7) corroborates that where prophetic time periods are determined in the trumpets, “the year-day principle” should be applied.

Stefanovic however, as a foremost living historicist scholar in the SDA church with maybe the best known extensive commentary on Revelation (which is also the most used in SDA colleges and universities around the world), denies the year-day principle in the 6th trumpet and refutes it by stating that it is a “moment in time” (Stefanovic, 2002:311). Rodríguez (2012) tabulates this position amongst that of other Adventist historicists and their positions on the trumpets. Miller (2012:4), in reaction to this, writes that he is concerned that there is “an idealist position” in this type of interpretation. While the year-day principle is well established among historicists within Adventism, some seems to be going into a new direction.

²³⁴ Fenner, A 2020, *I’m an Adventist, Not a Conspiracy Theorist*, Seventh-day Adventist Church North American Division, viewed 28 August 2020, <<https://www.nadadventist.org/news/im-adventist-not-conspiracy-theorist>>

This highlights a weakness among well recognised historicists within the SDA Church who have provided within their own writings conflicting answers, undermining the stated principle of historicism of one starting point and one ending point for a time prophecy.

Over time, some SDA scholars within the community of Adventism have tried or/and proposed to improve the current historicist understanding to various degrees. This has even caused further inconsistency among historicists as serious disagreement on the fundamental principles followed. Some may view this as progression within historicism, but what is theological progression?

Baker's Dictionary of Practical Theology indicates that the “concept of progressive revelation is based upon the conviction that revelation and redemption move along a historical line and that this historical line has a certain character to it” (Ramm, 1967, as cited in Turnbull, 1967:105). It further notes that “[t]here is a progression in Scripture and unless this principle of progression is recognized there can be no clear exegesis of Scripture” (Ramm, 1967, as cited in Turnbull, 1967:105). In this context, Worley (2014, as cited in Cole, 2014:262) determines that “[p]rogressive revelation indicates that historicism should be dynamic rather than become fossilised or limited in scope to any particular period.” Trying to “limit historicism” with regard to growth, according to Worley (2014, as cited in Cole, 2014:262), “leads to a misunderstanding of both historicism and the principle of progressive revelation.” This is why Treiyr (2005:18) concludes that at “this time of specialization and increased knowledge which corresponds to what the prophet already announced in ancient times,” it is imperative that “we have to grow also in the historicist understanding of the prophecies.”

The doctoral dissertation of Gluder Quispe, *The Apocalypse in Seventh-day Adventist Interpretation: Three Emphases*, is a valuable historical study which indicates the development in apocalyptic interpretation within the SDA Church. While maturing and growth took place within SDA historicism, there may have been a devolution where key aspects of historicism were negated for so called exegetical textuality among some scholars. While dynamic growth is critical within the context of progressive revelation, some proposed variants among SDA historicists are actually negating the very principle of historicism. Variants can include the following:

(i) *Philosophy of history*

Gane (2012:16) calls this proposed update to historicism the “philosophy-of-history interpretation” and a “recent approach to Revelation”. According to Gane (2012:10), this “philosophy of history interpretation adds to” historicism by “recognizing history as cyclical and repetitive.” Mueller (2013:1) correctly criticises this approach which he depicts as starting to “entertain futurism”. He warns that this philosophy of history approach which “combines futurism with historicism” leads the interpreter into several major challenges, such as opening “the door for an indefinite number of fulfillments” which in itself “obliterate the concept of recapitulation” (Mueller, 2013:1–2).

(ii) *Idealistic SDA historicism*

Sigve Tonstad, professor of religion at the SDA Loma Linda University, claims that a new apocalyptic hermeneutic is found. He asserts that historicism is inconsistent and that a better hermeneutic is needed by moving away from the “isms”²³⁵ which limit the interpreter. He suggests a “cosmic conflict”²³⁶ hermeneutic that is portrayed as a major new theological breakthrough. However, his proposed hermeneutic is based on the same old principle of idealism that is modified to be more acceptable. Whereas preterism, futurism and historicism see specific historical events as fulfillments of the Apocalypse, Tonstad (2019:29) suggests that “the claims to historical specificity must be modest” and that “Revelation trains its sight on *values* more than *events*...” (Tonstad, 2019:29). He therefore calls for a “value-centered understanding of Revelation” that “avoids the cynicism”²³⁷ that results from failed predictions” (Tonstad, 2019:29).

²³⁵ Tonstad, SK 2019, *Timeout: Cosmic Conflict vs. Historicism*, Spectrum Magazine, viewed 2 July 2020, <spectrummagazine.org/sabbath-school/2019/timeout-cosmic-conflict-vs-historicism>

²³⁶ Tonstad, SK 2019, *Timeout: Cosmic Conflict vs. Historicism*, Spectrum Magazine, viewed 2 July 2020, <spectrummagazine.org/sabbath-school/2019/timeout-cosmic-conflict-vs-historicism>

²³⁷ Tonstad (2019:29) protests that “[t]he dogmatist counts on support in prophecy for his militant attitude, and the complacent nihilist justifies his inaction by counting on prophecy’s inexorable momentum to make up the difference.”

(iii) Eclectic historicism

Former SDA scholar, Desmond Ford, suggested the use of the proleptic and apotelesmatic principle to establish an eclectic approach to apocalyptic. Ford (1978:68) refers to his classic principle that “each of the systems²³⁸ is right in what it affirms and wrong in what it denies.” Unfortunately, Ford lost sight of the very principle of historicism which specifically focuses on the whole panorama of history, unlike the extremely limited scope of preterism and futurism. The challenge in accepting the use of this principle is that “Ford is able to accept multiple reinterpretations and applications of prophetic symbols and statements” (Spangler, 1980:21).

Occasionally, confusion in Stevanovic’s,²³⁹ Paulien’s²⁴⁰ and Doukhan’s²⁴¹ use of the terms ‘preterism’, ‘futurism’ and ‘idealism’ could lead to eclecticism. A closer look might reveal that they have used it in a purely chronological sense rather than a theological one. However, considering this research, one should refrain from amalgamating hermeneutics like these that are irreconcilable.

These historicist variants portray a weakness among well recognised historicists within the SDA Church who have undermined basic principles of historicism. Yet, refraining from purely dismissing historicism and proposing a change to it like some historicists do, this interpretation school will now be mapped and analyzed.

²³⁸ Referring to the different schools of apocalyptic interpretation.

²³⁹ In the first edition of his Revelation commentary, Stefenovic (2002:12) writes, “If the message of the studied text was primarily for John’s day, then it calls for the preterist or idealist approach. On the other hand, if it discusses the very end times, then its interpretation calls for a futurist approach. If the studied text presents the events occurring throughout the course of history, however, a sound interpretation calls for a historicist approach to the text.” This was left out in the second edition as it caused some to believe that eclecticism was proposed, according to the author in a personal email to the researcher.

²⁴⁰ Paulien (2009:8) writes in his book *Seven Keys*: “It’s called historicism. It takes the first-century standpoint of preterism, the future standpoint of futurism, and the general interests of idealism as aspects of the book’s purpose...”

²⁴¹ Doukhan (1989:9) proposes, “Our method proceeds with elements of truth found in each of the three methods.” Fortunately, he (1989:9) does later clarify that “[a]ctually the three systems cannot be used together.”

5.2 MAPPING HISTORICIST TEACHINGS

Historicism comes in many forms, brands and branches, as indicated by Beale (1999:46), amongst others. Table 5.1 below presents a few I have identified.

Table 5.1 Various forms of historicism

Historicist Premillennialism	Historicist Postmillennialism	Historicist Amillennialism
(Coming of Christ before Millennium)	(Coming of Christ after Millennium)	(Millennium is spiritual)
Reformation Historicism	Reformation Historicism	A variant of traditional Historicism
• Premillennialist	• Reformed Historicism	• not many proponents
SDA Historicism		

Below is a concise summary and overview of the teachings of Seventh-day Adventist historicism,²⁴² which is the focus of this study. Please note that, while much more detail exists, only the main teachings are referred to here.

- Apocalyptic principle in Daniel 2: throughout history to the end
- Divine sovereignty and love
- Cosmic controversy
- Redemptive history
- Day-year principle
- Antichrist system
- Second Coming
- Prophetic mission: religious liberty and freedom of conscience

These key teachings will now be discussed in more detail.

²⁴² From hence with, when historicism is referred to, it will mean Seventh-day Adventist historicism as defined in section 5.1.4.

5.2.1 Apocalyptic principle in Daniel 2: throughout history to the end

“Daniel 2 presents a divine forecast in which God portrays the outcome of world history,” portraying “history from a secular viewpoint, one that would appeal to an Oriental despot” (LaRondelle, 2013:57). According to LaRondelle (2013:57), “[c]onservative Bible scholars sometimes call the prophecy of Daniel 2 the ABCs of apocalyptic prophecy” as it “introduces a pattern that Daniel’s prophecies repeat – that of presenting a sequence of coming kingdoms” until “the God of heaven intervenes in human affairs to establish His own eternal kingdom on earth.” A careful study of Daniel 2 will reveal that it serves as a foundation to the continuity of redemptive history whereon later apocalyptic prophecies, not only of Daniel, but also of Revelation build, as will be seen later in this section. LaRondelle (2007:8) mentions that “[b]oth Jesus and Paul apply the continuous outline of salvation history in Daniel 7–12 to their own contemporary times.”²⁴³

Daniel 2 relates the account of the young Jewish exile, Daniel, who receives a dream and its interpretation in answer to fervent prayer, after King Nebuchadnezzar had threatened his learned scholars with death if they could not tell and explain what he had dreamed. Daniel approaches the king, explaining first that only the God who gave the prophetic dream can give the correct interpretation (Daniel 2:28).²⁴⁴ Daniel then proceeds to describe the prophetic dream of a great statue of different metals and subsequently offers the interpretation. He interprets the head of gold to be Babylon, the chest and arms of silver to be the second kingdom following, the thighs of brass to be the third kingdom following, the legs of iron the fourth kingdom following and the feet of iron and clay to be a divided kingdom. After this, the kingdom of God will appear as a rock and destroy the kingdoms of this world. If correlated with history, it is traditionally understood as in the illustration below:

²⁴³ Treiye (2005:17) agrees that “historicism was the method of interpretation that Jesus and His apostles employed to interpret the prophecies of the Old Testament. They did not relegate all the prophecies of the Old Testament. They did not relegate all the prophetic messages to the future, but they spoke of events that were being fulfilled in their day with respect to the first coming of Christ.”

²⁴⁴ This shows that it is the text that should inform the way it is supposed to be interpreted.

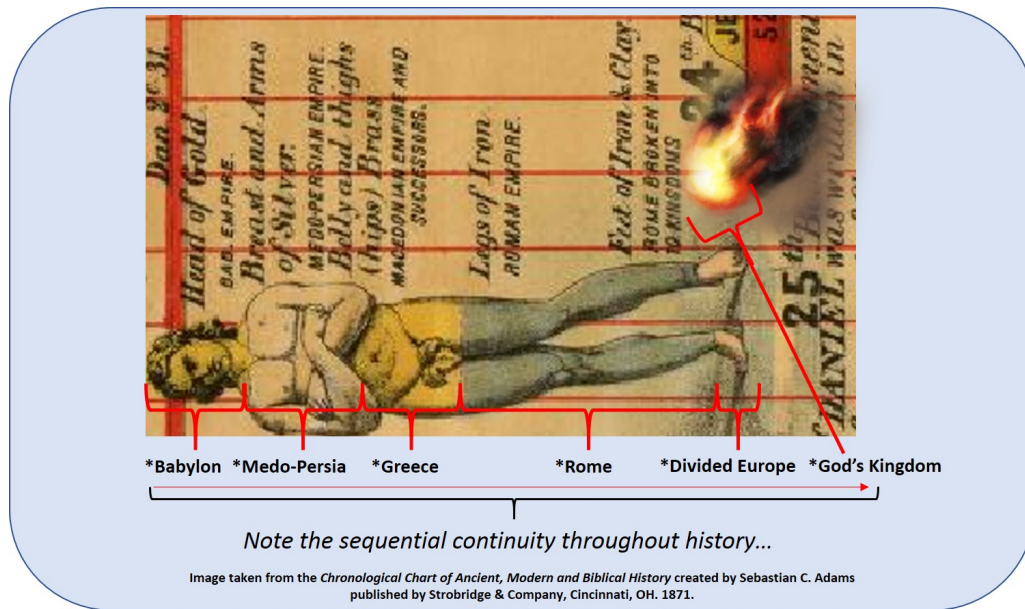


Figure 5.2 Traditional understanding of the prophetic statue in Daniel 2

This apocalyptic shows continuity throughout history, moving to the coming kingdom of God. The goal and direction of the prophecy is the eschaton, the rock, the kingdom of God in the future. The prophecy moves and extends towards this future throughout history. Forward. The symbols and starting point in history are clearly stated so that the interpretation can be unambiguous as the “vision of Daniel 2 used symbols to provide a step-by-step sequence of major events in history, from Daniel’s day until the end of the world” (Dybdahl, 2010:1658). This apocalyptic prophecy establishes the historicist principle upon which the subsequent prophecies build and can be understood, showing that the historicist hermeneutic is not a presupposed axiom that is just randomly chosen or preferred for the interpretation of apocalyptic. This is why Paulien exegetically can conclude that this vision is “an apocalyptic prophecy with a clear historical sequence running from the time of the prophet down to the end of earth’s history, the establishment of the kingdom of God.”²⁴⁵ The author suggests that the “explanation, grounded in the language, time and place of Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar, clearly marks out the sequence

²⁴⁵ Paulien, J 2020, Interpreting Biblical Apocalyptic (18): The Adventist Approach to Daniel II, Jon Paulien’s Blog, viewed 18 July 2020, <<https://revelation-armageddon.com/2020/07/interpreting-biblical-apocalyptic-18-the-adventist-approach-to-daniel-ii/>>

of events that moves the reader from the time when the prophecy was given to the time when history comes to its end.”²⁴⁶

This is why historicism is not contrived out of a vacuum; rather, as Paulien (2006, as cited in Reid, 2006:249) observes, it is the “historical sequences of apocalyptic” that “led the Adventist pioneers in harmony with virtually all Protestant commentators up to that time, to utilize a method of interpretation known as historicism when interpreting Daniel and Revelation.” In reference to the New Testament apocalyptic interpretation, LaRondelle (2007:8) can state that “we derive our fundamental principles of prophetic interpretation from” the “historical applications of Daniel.”

Several principles can be observed in this foundational passage of Daniel 2:

- There is a definite starting point in history which bears and moves forward through history to the coming eschaton.
- The symbols have literal history specific fulfillments.
- The interpretation reveals God’s sovereignty over history, as will be seen in the next section.
- The end goal and focus of the prophecy is the coming kingdom of God.
- Portrayed by the rock of the ages, Christ is presented as the ultimate *Eschatos* in apocalyptic who will bring forth God’s kingdom.

Goldstein (2018:12) concludes that, “given the prophetic ‘key’ found in Daniel 2, Seventh-day Adventists are on the right track in regard to adhering to the historicist hermeneutic.” In Doukhan’s (2019:8) words, the “historicist approach is based essentially upon the principle provided by the prophet himself... (Dan. 2:36-45).” The subsequent biblical apocalyptic prophecies should be interpreted in a similar way. This would include the book of Revelation, for it “builds on the approach of Daniel to focus on major turning points in Christian history, from the cross (Rev. 5:6, 9, 12) to the Second Coming (19:11–16) and beyond (chap. 20)” (Dybdahl, 2010:1658). In actuality, “John himself indicates that

²⁴⁶ Paulien, J 2020, Interpreting Biblical Apocalyptic (18): The Adventist Approach to Daniel II, Jon Paulien’s Blog, viewed 18 July 2020, <<https://revelation-armageddon.com/2020/07/interpreting-biblical-apocalyptic-18-the-adventist-approach-to-daniel-ii/>>

historicism is the correct approach to this book in the very first verse (1:1), where he alludes to Daniel 2:28 and 45” (Dybdahl, 2010:1658).

Furthermore, Beale (1999:181) exegetically proves that Revelation is patterned after Daniel 2 in reference to the beginning word of the Apocalypse, stating that “ἀποκάλυψις (‘apocalypse’) is ...part of an allusion to Daniel 2, since the whole of Rev. 1:1 is patterned after the broad structure of Dan. 2:28–30, 45–47 (cf. LXX, Theod.),” because “the verb ἀποκαλύπτω (‘reveal’) appears five times (cf. also 2:19, 22 in Theod.), the phrase ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι (‘what must come to pass’) appears three times (see Theod.), and σημαίνω (‘signify’) appears twice (LXX; cf. also 2:23 LXX).” LaRondelle (2013:55) further confirms that the connection between Daniel 2 and Revelation is essential as Revelation uses more direct wording from Daniel 2 in its first verse. This is illustrated in Table 5.2 below.

Table 5.2 A comparison of Daniel 2:28 and Revelation 1:1

Daniel 2:28	Revelation 1:1
There is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come [Greek: <i>dei genesthai ep' eschaton ton hemêrôn</i>].	God gave him to show what must soon take place [Greek: <i>dei genesthai en tache</i>]. ²⁴⁷

Exegetically then, “the text of Revelation supports a historicist approach” (Mueller, 2013:1) and is not presupposed. Therefore, Gulley (2016:22) confirms, “It is the deductive study of Revelation that gives evidence that the historicist view is present throughout the book.” Paulien (2008:5) concurs, “The book of Revelation guides us in understanding the successive ages of history and their culmination in a catastrophic struggle between the

²⁴⁷ Beale (1999:181–182) further elucidates that the “significance of this OT background for v 1 is best understood from examination of the following phrase, δεῖξαι ... ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι (‘to show ... what must come to pass’), which, together with ἐν τάχει (‘quickly’), is derived from Dan. 2:28–29, 45 (as discussed above, pp. 152–53). ἐν τάχει (‘quickly’) is a deliberate substitute for Daniel’s ἐπ’ ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν (‘in the latter days’; e.g., Dan. 2:28) and connotes neither the speedy manner in which the Daniel prophecy is to be fulfilled nor the mere possibility that it could be fulfilled at any time,³ but the definite, imminent time of fulfillment, which likely has already begun in the present.”

forces of good and evil.” Mueller (2013:5) concludes that “[f]rom a biblical perspective, it seems evident that historicism provides the correct framework to interpret apocalyptic prophecy,” while Finley (2020:169) agrees that historicism, as the “key to interpreting the entire book of Revelation”, is confirmed in Revelation 1:19 where John is told “to write (1) ‘the things which you have seen,’ (2) ‘the things which are, and’ (3) ‘the things that will take place after this.’” Finley (2020:169) then observes that it is evident that these prophecies “begin where the prophet is, and they take us from that point down to the end of time.” Table 5.3 below supports this, showing Sabuin’s (2008:173) proposed outline of Revelation based on the internal textual indication.

Table 5.3 Sabuin’s outline of Revelation

REFERENCE	INTERNAL INDICATOR	FULFILLMENT	COVERAGE
Rev 2:1–3:21	“Things which are and things which are about to come” (1:19)	Local and Historical	The Seven Churches ⁷¹
Rev 4:1–11:19	“Things which must take place after these things” (4:1)	Historical	The seven seals; the seven trumpets
Rev 15:1–22:5	“Seven last plagues” (15:1)—“They have taken place” (21:6)	Eschatological	The seven-bowl plagues; Second Coming; Millennium; New Heaven and Earth and the New Jerusalem

In summary, Sabuin (2008:173) accentuates that Revelation covers “a comprehensive sweep of events,” presenting (1) events that begin with a local fulfillment (or application) to the first reader of the first century AD that at the same time cover the timeline of history; (2) events that happen through the historical timeline from the time of the vision up to the eschaton; (3) events that will happen at the end of the history of the old heaven and earth that continues into eternity.

In conclusion, it can be stated that despite the “various ways that Daniel and Revelation are interpreted” (Gulley, 2016:38), it can rightfully be deduced that “the way true to authorial intent is the historicist method” (Gulley, 2016:38). Gulley believes (2016:38) that “Daniel and Revelation both unfold their contents as they pass through history.” Therefore, historicism is not presuppositional, since “[b]iblical evidence for the historicist method of interpretation is imbedded in the books” (Gulley, 2016:38).

5.2.2 Divine sovereignty and love

Further to Daniel 2, verse 22 states, “He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness, And light dwells with Him.” This entails that God alone knows the future and therefore he gives prophecy to the extent he wants us to understand history into the future. Bennett (1986:346) agrees that Daniel 2 “is a clear example of God’s disclosure of both His sovereignty and His foreknowledge.” Further to God’s sovereignty, Daniel 2 shows us how biblical apocalyptic unveils God’s control over history through prophecy, down through the stream of time, until the coming kingdom of God. God’s sovereignty and control over history are revealed as Daniel is shown “not what might be before Israel and other nations, but (from the vantage point of God’s foreknowledge) what will be” (Davidson, 2007, as cited in Du Preez, 2007:51). Thus, within apocalyptic, “[t]here is no presentation of the alternatives of blessings and curses for obedience or rebellion,” because in apocalyptic “God reveals in unbroken succession the rise and fall of nations” (Davidson, 2007, as cited in Du Preez, 2007:51).

According to Davidson (2007, as cited in Du Preez, 2007:46), this characteristic indicates the fundamentally different divine perspective between classical and apocalyptic literature. The author explains that, whereas classical literature reveals God’s original plan for the world, “what *might have been*,” ... “apocalyptic prophecy reveals that God is not taken by surprise, but knows in detail what will happen, what the human choices will be.” Thus, according to historicism, the Books of Daniel and Revelation reveal what will be. The futurity in apocalyptic shows the God outside of history who has worked within history in the classical prophetic sense, but will break into history “from somewhere beyond history” and bring “an end to the history,” in the words of Moltmann (1993:15).

But what about divine love and human freedom in the light of such transcendent sovereignty? The tension between God’s sovereignty and love has been the subject of many theological books, disputes and resolutions over the centuries. Tied to divine sovereignty is “the closely related axiomatic conceptions of transcendence and self-sufficiency, necessity, simplicity, timelessness, immutability, impassibility, omnipotence and omniscience,” according to Peckham (2015:23). How are these attributes compatible with God’s love and our freedom of will? Gulley (2011:308) proposes that “God’s

sovereignty is best understood in the light of Calvary.” At the cross event, God’s sovereign outworking of redemption took place as a God who is “independent of any relationship with the world,” one who “is perfect and self-sufficient, meaning that he is not growing and neither does he need this or any world”; yet, “he nevertheless desires a reciprocal love relationship with each person” (Peckham, 2015:278), thus showing his risk-taking and passible love as he sacrificed himself. According to Peckham (2015:278), this “God is omnipotent but” also “passible, being profoundly affected by and concerned about the world he has created...” For Gulley (2016:732), “[t]his truth is rooted in the relational Trinity, who eternally exist in a reciprocal relationship of love.” Gulley (2016:732) maintains that it “is the love, and not merely the sovereignty of God, that comes to light in the Trinity” in so far “they relate to each other in their inner history,” in a desire “to relate with all humans in their saving history.” Gulley (2016:732) describes that “[t]heir inner history is unfolding, overflowing, and reflected in their outer history of covenant love for all humans.”

Gulley (2011:537) further observes that “[t]he absolute sovereignty of God (supralapsarian view), which chooses only a few, rejecting the rest, seems far from the God of John 3:16,” that describes a God “who loves the world so that whosoever believes in Him (choosing His salvation) will be saved (see also 1 John 2:2).” When the Bible is surveyed, the “historical facts qualify God’s sovereignty as compatible with human freedom to choose – to elect or reject God in history” (Gulley, 2011:308). Gulley (2011:336) sees the biblical testimony as demonstrating “the power of human choice, and God’s willingness to restrain His sovereignty accordingly.” While “Christ came to reveal what His Father is like (John 14:9),” one never sees “Him ignoring human choice by demonstrating an absolute sovereignty²⁴⁸ over His intelligent created beings” (Gulley, 2011:544). Hence, based “upon the biblical view of a relational Trinity,” it is more sensical “to look at human destiny in the light of relational freedom” (Gulley, 2011:615). This will include “a balance between God’s immutable plan to redeem and human freedom to

²⁴⁸ “The sovereign cannot make the subjects freely acknowledge his sovereignty. The sovereign can compel his subjects to bow in his presence, but he cannot compel them to bow freely.” Bruce Reichenbach, quoted in Basinger, eds., *Predestination and Free Will*, 105.

accept or reject the plan (John 3:16)” (Gulley, 2011:615). In essence, “Jesus Christ is forever the God-Man, giving concrete evidence of a relationship that can never be broken” (Gulley, 2011:615). We should therefore “accept both divine sovereignty and human freedom, because Scripture teaches both” (Gulley, 2011:615). In conclusion, the “balance between the two is found in the relational Trinity as a God of love (1 John 4:8–16)” (Gulley, 2011:615). Divine sovereignty excluded from divine love is tyranny, for “God’s character is love, and all that God does [and all who God is] is loving” (Peckham, 2015:278), including his sovereignty. As divine sovereign, “God does not need to love humans, or any creatures.” Yet, “he voluntarily creates beings on whom he bestows his love, which is grounded in his wholly loving character, and enjoys a reciprocal love relationship with all who positively respond” (Peckham, 2015:278).

5.2.3 Cosmic controversy

The cosmic controversy is the age-old battle between God and Satan, good and evil, light and darkness. Gulley (2003:xxii) explains it as follows:

The cosmic controversy is the biblical metanarrative within which human creation, the great stories of the Old Testament, the life and death of Christ, and the great stories of the New Testament took place; where the resurrected ministry of Christ and work of the Spirit of Christ take place; and where the return of Christ and the final judgment will take place.

Between the pages of “these two ends of Scripture unfold the cosmic controversy against God, and the response of the Trinity to resolve the controversy through redemption and restoration” (Gulley, 2016:702). Seeing that this narrative unfolds in all of scripture, its portrayal in Daniel and Revelation specifically deals “with the unfolding and climax of the cosmic controversy,” according to Gulley (2016:5). Apocalyptic passages like Revelation 12 are central in showing that “the cosmic controversy from its inception until the second advent of Christ is significant” (Gulley, 2016:24). The cosmic controversy to Gulley (2016:24) “is the worldview behind both history and eschatology.”

According to this cosmic controversy perspective, “this controversy began in heaven, where Satan rebelled against God” (Gulley, 2016:10). It started because, although God is sovereign, in his being he is love, and thus allowed “freedom to intelligent beings” (Gulley, 2012:296). God did not create a devil. Lucifer, made in love by his creator, “was once a cherubim at the throne of God; however, he became proud and wanted to sit on God’s throne” (Gulley, 2011:289). He was a free being and could choose to serve and obey God or not. He chose himself and started to accuse God, becoming Satan (accuser). Gulley (2011:289) explains that “Satan wanted to replace God and lied about God” and was successful in influencing “a third of the angels to join him in rebellion” against God and his law. Gulley (2011:289) proposes²⁴⁹ that “Satan must have questioned God’s love and justice” for “there seems to be no other explanation for why perfect beings became disenchanted with the God who had given them life and everything they needed.”

Gulley (2012:446) deduces that “the essence of the cosmic controversy” is that “Satan wants to replace Christ.” For Gulley (2016:10), this “controversy runs throughout Daniel and Revelation as it runs throughout history,” which necessarily deems historicism critical in such interpretation.

The result of this rebellion against God and his law was that this “controversy led to war in heaven, and Satan and his angels lost their place in heaven” (Gulley, 2011:289). In revenge, “Satan schemed to get back at God by causing humans to rebel, and he was successful in Eden” (Gulley, 2011:289). Gulley (2011:289) believes that when “Adam and Eve gave their allegiance to Satan, he became the ruler, or god, of this world, and as such he attended the cosmic meetings” in heaven as he became the legal master of earth. Here he utilised “the opportunity to accuse humans and God” (Gulley, 2011:289). However, on “Calvary Satan was exposed as the murderer and liar that he is, and God was revealed as the God of love that He is” (Gulley, 2011:289). The result of “God’s victory over Satan at Calvary meant Satan was cast down to this world (Rev. 12:9–12), and Satan went to war against the church in the Christian era” (Gulley, 2011:289).

²⁴⁹ Gulley (2011:289) correctly observes that “[t]he fact that Satan slandered God (rĕkūllā, Ezek. 28:16) and questioned His word (Gen. 2:17; 3:1–6), coupled with the fact that he is a liar from the beginning, gives insight into his rebellion (John 8:44).”

Gulley (2003:430) poignantly asks, “What is the issue in the battle? Why did God permit it to happen? What is at stake?” He proposes that the answer is found “in the metanarrative that we call the cosmic controversy,” an “overarching biblical worldview that is larger than a confined soteriological one” (Gulley, 2003:430). Gulley (2003:442) states that “[t]he issue before the universe is God’s justice” with the challenges like, “Is He just in what He does? Is He just in having a law?” Gulley (2003:442) maintains that this “matter of God’s justice is central in the metanarrative of the cosmic controversy” and suggests that “all doctrines of systematic theology must be understood in relation to this issue, for, properly understood, God’s revelation manifests His justice in every truth of Scripture.”

Having discussed the apocalyptic principle in Daniel 2: through history to the end, which is foundational to historicism, as well as divine sovereignty and love as its floorwork and cosmic controversy as its framework, the four pillars of historicism will now be viewed in the light of the cosmic controversy and will conclude in the roof of historicism’s construction. These pillars are: redemptive history, the day-year principle, the Antichrist system, and the Second Coming.

5.2.4 Redemptive history

Redemptive history is less significant without the context of the cosmic controversy. Gulley (2016:xxii) recognises that “the biblical worldview of the cosmic controversy is the unchanging context throughout salvation history.” One could ask if Christ would come to save humanity were it not that we were lost because of the cosmic controversy. The central factor in redemptive history is that “Christ conquered Satan at Calvary” (Gulley, 2016:31) and worked out salvation for humanity. All truth and doctrine revolve around this historical event and depend upon it. Therefore, “Calvary was the pivotal moment of the cosmic controversy” (Gulley, 2016:31).

Gulley (2003:442) challenges the popular notion that “Calvary is seen as Christ dying for humans so they can go to heaven.” He evinces that there “is more” to Calvary (Gulley, 2003:442) and finds that “Colossians teaches that Christ created all things in heaven and on Earth (Col. 1:16), and that ‘in him all things hold together’ (Col. 1:17).” Gulley (2012:440) further finds that “Christ’s cosmic mission is articulated by Paul: ‘For God was

pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him [Christ], and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross' (Col. 1:19–20)."²⁵⁰ Against this consideration, Gulley (2003:443) asks, "In what way could Calvary reconcile things, or people, in heaven?" He renders that "Satan was behind the death of Christ," and therefore "he was exposed for what he really is – a devil" (Gulley, 2003:443). Satan was unmasked before the universe for who he really was, stripping away all the lies that he accused God of. Now his access to heaven's council was barred.

Gulley (2003:443) articulates that in "contrast, because Christ allowed Himself to be crucified, He was seen for who He really is – a God of love (1 John 4:8, 16)." Scripturally Gulley (2003:429) elucidates that a "powerful contrast is given in Isaiah between the pride of the rebel (Isa. 14:12–14) and the humility of Christ (Isa. 52:13–15 and Isa. 53:1–12)." The author exhibits that "Satan attempts to become God, which is above his status as created being, while Jesus becomes human, which is below his status as creator God" (Gulley, 2003:429). This is the "stark contrast that epitomizes the cosmic controversy," according to Gulley (2003:429), for it is this "contrast that led to one killing and the other dying at Calvary." It is here at the cross event where, to Gulley (2003:441), the "ultimate revelation of God's love and justice was given through the death of Jesus." This was sealed and confirmed through Christ's resurrection without which the cross event would be worthless. By conquering the jaws of death, Satan was overcome in this cosmic conflict. Gulley (2003:441) holds that "[t]hroughout eternity it will be seen that Calvary is the greatest revelation of God's love and His justice, and it is the standard by which all other love and justice are measured." Succinctly, "Christ's death was the outpouring of the Godhead for undeserving humans that will forever impact all intelligent created beings" (Gulley, (2003:441). Likewise, Christ's resurrection was the showing forth of the Triune God's power and fulfillment of promise and prophecy.

²⁵⁰ "We should therefore understand this statement to be a reference to the cosmic significance of Christ's work." Vaughan, C. 1980. *Colossians and Philemon, Bible Study Commentary Series*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan. 11:186.

Gulley (2003:445) affirms that “[a]lthough Satan was defeated by Christ at Calvary, he hasn’t relented,” for though the “war has been won, ... the battle continues.” Regarding this continuing battle, Gulley (2016:103) refers to Ephesians 6:12: “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” Gulley (2016:103) defines that this “is the cosmic controversy” wherein “Satan hates Christ and hates His church.” He urges that because “[t]he battle rages,” the “church is called to ‘put on the full armor of God’ (Eph. 6:13)” (Gulley, 2016:103). This battle can specifically be seen in Revelation 12, where “there is an overview of the cosmic controversy” (Gulley, 2016:103). Here in Revelation 12, “Satan is seen fighting against the church” (Gulley, 2016:104). The way in which the church reacts to these attacks “became a witness to the universe of the kind of God it serves” (Gulley, 2003:443). In the church’s witness there is “a redemption-reconciliation ministry that has everything to do with resolving the cosmic controversy, in order to restore the universe to its pre-controversy state” (Gulley, 2012:441). God has a purpose for his church. Gulley (2016:117) suggests that this “purpose of the church, the end to which all the gifts function, is to affect the universe, for ‘through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (Eph. 3:10–11).” The church should then function with purpose, knowing it is called to make “a contribution to the cosmic controversy” (Gulley, 2016:117). While the “cosmic controversy brings disunity into the world,” it “does not affect the unity among the Trinity” (Gulley, 2016:49). This unity should be reflected in the Church – a unity of divine love received from the love given and displayed in Christ at Calvary. Gulley (2016:117) writes that in “the church, He gathers lost humans, recreates them to be Christ-like,” and gives them gifts “not only to serve the lost but to reveal Christ to the universe. Their changed lives reveal the effects of Calvary.” Regarding this “cosmic controversy issue,” the “resolution of the controversy is gained through God revealing who He is and what He is like in human history” (Gulley, 2016:89). This is displayed through the Church.

It is this God who beyond the physical earthly temple declares his church to be a temple to his glory. Christ, who referred to himself as temple, says his body, the Church, is temple. Yet, while the Church is God's temple on earth, there is a heavenly temple where Christ in his priestly ministry intercedes for the Church and her members amidst the cosmic controversy. Gulley (2016:22) confirms that the "sanctuary is important in the book of Daniel (7:9–14) and in the book of Revelation." Gulley (2016:22–23) opines that "Richard Davidson rightly concludes, according to John, that 'the heavenly sanctuary is not a metaphor for heaven, but a place in heaven (see Rev. 11:19; 14:17; 15:5).'" Furthermore, Gulley (2016:23) emphasises that although "there is a necessary intensification of the earthly type in the heavenly temple/sanctuary antitype, it is a real place in heaven just as the earthly sanctuary/temples were real places on earth." Moreover, Gulley (2016:23) insists that there "is a necessary 'literal reality' in the correspondence between the heavenly original and the earthly copy." He terms this reality "a spatiotemporal correspondence" (Gulley, 2016:23) and suggests that the "heavenly temple/sanctuary is no more to be identified with the entirety of heaven than the earthly sanctuary is to be identified with planet earth (cf. the NIV translation of Heb. 9:24)."

While his body, the Church, is on earth, Christ ministers on her behalf in heaven as priest. Treiyer (2008:69) mentions that "[t]he Epistle to the Hebrews declares that the Son of God 'opened for us' (consecrated or inaugurated) 'a new and living way that enters through the veil' (curtain or door) of the heavenly Sanctuary.'" This same epistle "presents Him as 'our forerunner' entering into the temple of God" (Treiyer, 2008:69). Since the "war for control of the universe is not finished," and this "cosmic conflict within which we live our daily lives continues to present us with the challenges of a sinful planet" (Treiyer, 2014:191), in Christ we have a priest to our avail ever ready to help. Treiyer (2014:191) tells that in "every struggle, in every confrontation with the powers of evil, He is our helper. In His heavenly temple we obtain a safe spiritual refuge," for he is our heavenly helper – our mighty high priest. The apocalyptic Christ provides present salvific meaning as divine priest from heaven's temple to his Church through which he displays divine love.

Gulley (2012:480) submits that Christ could only be king "because He was God, lived a human life, and died to save all humans." He reasons that "Scripture predicts an eternal

rule of David on His throne, which of course could not be realized by the first king David” (Gulley, 2012:488). Gulley (2012:488) considers the biblical data that to him indicates that since Christ’s “installation on heaven’s throne at His Father’s side, Christ (son of David) has experienced a joint rule with the Father.” Biblically, the kingly “rule of Christ continues until redemption and restoration is completed” (Gulley, 2012:488). With reference to Paul’s injunction of “Christ’s handing over of the Kingdom to the Father means that Christ will no longer function as King-Priest (for redemption and restoration); rather, He will join the Father as King and they will rule forever on the other side of the completed work of Christ” (Gulley, 2012:488). This means that “after the King-Priest functions are completed, Christ rejoins the Trinity in a joint rule²⁵¹ for eternity” (Gulley, 2012:488). Gulley (2012:488) therefore holds that “there is no future time when Jesus becomes the new David on an earthly throne, as many scholars believe, ruling over a restored Israel.” Rather, “Christ’s present rule²⁵² is designed for the completion of redemption and restoration” (Gulley, 2012:488). Gulley (2012:488) reasons that this “is why the present ministry of Christ is that of King-Priest” for both “the priestly ministry and kingly ministry of Christ are required to bring about the fullness of redemption and restoration.”

Gulley (2012:481) contends that Christ’s ministry as king-priest “will continue until the close of the cosmic controversy” at which time “He will move to His own throne and begin to reign as King over all the redeemed.” Gulley (2012:481) upholds that “[b]etween these two events, Christ comes in the second advent as King of kings (Rev. 19:16), because He was victorious at Calvary.” To Gulley (2012:485–486), Christ is “the divine Son of God, He is the King-Priest whose rule will liberate the world and the cosmos from the cosmic controversy.”

In the historicist paradigm, Christ is the coming king, not only to present himself as king but also to redeem his church and go to battle in the cosmic controversy when he comes

²⁵¹ Gulley (2012:488) explains that “the joint rule of the Trinity apparently began at the creation of intelligent beings and continued until Jesus left heaven to launch His mission to redeem humans and restore the cosmos to its pre-Fall state. When the pre-Fall state has been restored, then the joint rule of the Trinity will resume.”

²⁵² Gulley (2012:488) considers that “[t]his double assignment as Redeemer and Restorer has everything to do with the double ministry of Christ in heaven’s sanctuary, at the Father’s throne.”

with the second coming as depicted in Revelation 19. Doukhan (2002:200) shows how the focus of the whole Apocalypse is on the Coming Christ as King, echoed in its introduction and conclusion. This is presented in Table 5.4 below.

Table 5.4 Apocalyptic focus on the Coming Christ as King

Introduction	Conclusion
“From him . . . who is to come” (Rev. 1:4)	“Behold, I am coming soon” (Rev. 22:7)
“Look, he is coming” (Rev. 1:7)	“Behold, I am coming soon” (Rev. 22:12)
“The Lord . . . ‘who is to come’” (Rev. 1:8)	“The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come’” (Rev. 22:17)
“On the Lord’s Day” (Rev. 1:10)	“Yes, I am coming soon” (Rev. 22:20)
	“Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20)

5.2.5 Day-year principle

The day-year principle also makes more sense in the context of the cosmic controversy. Regarding the prophetic time periods that stretch through long historical periods according to the day-year principle, Shea (1982:86) maintains “they provided microcosms of the economy of sin during which the great controversy between good and evil has been worked out.” Shea (1982:86) deduces that if “these were merely literal time periods, they would not have provided much of a proving ground for that controversy.” It is thus evident to Shea (1982:86) that “[a]pocalyptic prophecies present a longer range view of history than do classical prophecies.” Therefore, these “time periods in apocalyptic” must stand “symbolically for longer periods of actual historical time” (Shea, 1982:86).

Pfandl (2010:81) establishes that the year-day principle “constitutes the backbone of the historicist interpretation of apocalyptic prophecy” and Timm (2007, as cited in Du Preez, 2007:233) agrees that it is a “basic hermeneutical component of the historicist school.” Goldstein (2018:10) confirms that “[c]entral to the historicist approach is the day-year principle” which suggests “that in certain apocalyptic passages depicting prophetic time, the word day or days is to be understood as year or years.” In addition, Shea (1982:56) points out that “[c]ommentators from two of the three main schools of interpretation of the

apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, namely preterists and futurists, interpret the time elements in these prophecies as literal time,” whereas historicists “have interpreted these references as symbolically representing longer periods of historical time.” Shea (1982:56) explains that these periods “should be interpreted according to the principle that a ‘prophetic day’ stands for a ‘year’ of actual calendrical time extending through the historical events in which they were fulfilled.” According to Shea (1982:56), this “year-day principle provides a basic diagnostic difference between the historicist school of interpretation that employs this principle and the preterist and futurist schools that do not.”

Yet Tonstad, challenges historicism’s day-year principle in that “Revelation predicts events accurately and specifically right down to concrete dates on the calendar (such as 313, 538, 1565, 1798).”²⁵³ He then quotes Pate as saying that historicism presents “failed attempts to locate the fulfillment of Revelation in the course of circumstances of history has doomed it to continual revision as time passed and, ultimately, to obscurity.”²⁵⁴ The principle that Tonstad and others miss is that if, for argument's sake, a date is mistaken, adapted²⁵⁵ or changed, it does not affect the historical stretch of the 1 260 years that are generally accepted among historicists as marking the reign of the Antichrist system.²⁵⁶

The question remains whether there is scriptural credence for such usage, in addition to mere logic, within the hermeneutic paradigm. As will be shown below, scriptural credence is indeed confirmed by similar usage by Old Testament authors, prophets, and Apocalyptic. All of these scriptures are in the context of miniature symbolization where the year-day principle should only be applied “to the time elements of those specific

²⁵³ Tonstad, SK 2019, *Timeout: Revelation And The Crisis Of Historicism*, Spectrum Magazine, viewed 12 July 2020, < spectrummagazine.org/sabbath-school/2019/timeout-revelation-and-crisis-historicism>

²⁵⁴ Tonstad, SK 2019, *Timeout: Revelation And The Crisis Of Historicism*, Spectrum Magazine, viewed 12 July 2020, < spectrummagazine.org/sabbath-school/2019/timeout-revelation-and-crisis-historicism>

²⁵⁵ Further to this is the fact that no adaptation to a date can offset the critical support this time period bears to the prophecy’s further prediction that a state-church system will be once again established to enforce a theocracy in the end times.

²⁵⁶ Froom (1982, vol 2: 794) states, “True, the Protestant Historicists differed considerably as to when to begin and when to end the 1260-day period of the Antichrist, but they were all united in the conviction that a period of 1260 years had been allotted to him...”

symbolic prophecies whose symbols represent broader entities than the symbols themselves” (Timm 2007, as cited in Du Preez, 2007:236).

Goldstein (2018:10) clarifies that “the Old Testament shows a clear link between the terms *days* and *years*” and that although different “texts may be translated *year* or *years* or *yearly* – because that is the obvious meaning – the Hebrew word is, literally, *days*.” Shea (1982:66) writes that “in the historical narratives of the OT a recognition of a particular kind of relationship between ‘days’ and ‘years’” exists and that in “these instances the word ‘days’ (always in the plural form) was actually used to stand for ‘years.’” Shea (1982:66) keenly observes that “[t]his kind of thought pattern appears to find its roots in the genealogy of Genesis 5.” He shows it as follows: “X lived so many years and begat Y. And X lived so many years after he begat Y and begat sons and daughters. And all the days of X were so many years, and he died” (Shea, 1982:66).

Subsequently, Shea (1982:66) notes that an “important relationship between ‘days’ and ‘years’ and prophecy has been derived from the use of these two time units in the third sentence of the Genesis 5 genealogy.” Within this context, “God said, ‘My spirit shall not abide in man for ever, for he is flesh, but his days shall be a hundred and twenty years’ (Gen 6:3)” (Shea, 1982:66).

Old Testament narrative examples include (Shea 1982:66):

[T]he Passover was to be kept, literally, ‘from days to days,’ that is, from year to year, or yearly.” (Exod 13:10)

Hannah took the garments she had made for Samuel once each year (literally, ‘from days to days’). (1 Sam 2:19)

A yearly sacrifice was spoken of as the ‘sacrifice of the days’. (1 Sam 20:6)

Shea (1982:68) elucidates that “Hebrew poetry provides us with further examples of the thought patterns out of which the year-day principle naturally developed” and offers the following examples:

Are thy days as the days of man,
or thy years as man's years? (Job 10:5)

The wicked man writhes in pain all his days,
through all the years that are laid up for the ruthless. (Job 15:20)

I consider the days of old,
I remember the years long ago. (Ps 77:5)

Gentry shows how the prophet Ezekiel too used this interpretation, illuminating that in Ezekiel 4:6 the same standard of prophetic measure is used as in as Daniel: 'I have laid on you a day for each year.'²⁵⁷

One of the most distinct apocalyptic prophecies that utilises the day-year principle is the prophecy of Daniel 9. Goldstein (2018:12) comments that the "evidence for the day-year principle behind the 70-week prophecy of Daniel 9:24–27 is abundant – and hardly limited to Adventists." He (2018:12) postulates that "[e]xegetes have been applying it to this prophecy for millennia..." Just based on pure logic, Goldstein (2018:12) says that "the prophecy is nonsensical without" the day-year principle. If no such principle is employed, "the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem, until Messiah the Prince' (Dan. 9:25) would be a literal 69 weeks, or just one year and four months and one week." The "prophecy makes no sense with a literal 69 weeks," according to Goldstein (2018:12). However, when this principle is applied, "it fits within the time frame of the two events that the prophecy portrays" (Goldstein 2018:12).

Just on surface value, Goldstein (2018:12) deems that "the way that the text expresses the time – 'seventy weeks' – was ... not a common way to express literal time." Instead, Goldstein (2018:12) poses the question why Gabriel did not say "one year and four months and one week are determined upon thy people," which would be the typical way

²⁵⁷ Gentry, KL 2013, *Structure And Chronology Of Daniel's 70 Weeks*, Postmillennial Worldview, viewed 13 July 2020, < <https://postmillennialworldview.com/2013/11/11/structure-and-chronology-of-daniels-70-weeks/>>

of describing literal time. The only sensible conclusion is that he “did not express it literally because he did not mean it literally” (Goldstein, 2018:12).

Preterists acknowledge that a year-day principle should be utilised within this apocalyptic prophecy. Preterist Gentry, with reference to the Daniel 9 prophecy, argues that “[t]here is ample justification for the days standing for actual years.”²⁵⁸ The most logical justification for this, in Gentry’s mind, is that “a period of a literal seventy weeks would be too short to accomplish the fulfillment²⁵⁹ of all that is expected.”²⁶⁰ Gentry poses the natural question, “[W]hat comfort would flow to Daniel in learning the city would be rebuilt and destroyed within such a brief period?” Consequently, Gentry concludes that one “must look beyond the literal for the proper measure.”²⁶¹ He enforces this application in stating that “there is Scriptural warrant for measuring days in terms of years.”²⁶² He then refers to passages such as “Genesis 29:27–28... Numbers 14:34... Ezekiel 4:6.”²⁶³ This is quite surprising and ironical, as in Chapter 3 it was shown that preterism argues to take most prophetic time literally.

True to their hermeneutic, futurists also interpret prophetic time literally, except for this prophecy of Daniel 9, as seen in Chapter 4. They endeavour to argue that the “word for

²⁵⁸ Gentry, KL 2013, *Structure And Chronology Of Daniel’s 70 Weeks*, Postmillennial Worldview, viewed 13 July 2020, < <https://postmillennialworldview.com/2013/11/11/structure-and-chronology-of-daniels-70-weeks/>>

²⁵⁹ Shea (1982:77) agrees: “Since these events could not have been accomplished in 70 literal weeks, it is evident that this later time period was intended to be understood symbolically.”

²⁶⁰ Gentry, KL 2013, *Structure And Chronology Of Daniel’s 70 Weeks*, Postmillennial Worldview, viewed 13 July 2020, < <https://postmillennialworldview.com/2013/11/11/structure-and-chronology-of-daniels-70-weeks/>>

²⁶¹ Gentry, KL 2013, *Structure And Chronology Of Daniel’s 70 Weeks*, Postmillennial Worldview, viewed 13 July 2020, < <https://postmillennialworldview.com/2013/11/11/structure-and-chronology-of-daniels-70-weeks/>>

²⁶² Gentry, KL 2013, *Structure And Chronology Of Daniel’s 70 Weeks*, Postmillennial Worldview, viewed 13 July 2020, < <https://postmillennialworldview.com/2013/11/11/structure-and-chronology-of-daniels-70-weeks/>>

²⁶³ Gentry, KL 2013, *Structure And Chronology Of Daniel’s 70 Weeks*, Postmillennial Worldview, viewed 13 July 2020, < <https://postmillennialworldview.com/2013/11/11/structure-and-chronology-of-daniels-70-weeks/>>

weeks in Daniel 9:24 really means ‘weeks of years’”²⁶⁴ (Goldstein, 2018:12). Goldstein (2018:12) suggests that even “if one accepted this dubious suggestion, far from negating the day-year principle, it only affirms it.” Goldstein (2018:12) further argues that if “each week really meant a ‘week of years’, then each week would stand for seven years – the exact conclusion that the day-year principle leads to.” Goldstein (2018:12) therefore maintains that the “day-year principle is so ingrained in Daniel 9:24–27²⁶⁵ that a scholarly notion concocted to debunk it actually confirms it instead.” Shea’s (1982:75) literary observation is that “if it is valid to apply the year-day principle to the ‘days’ of the ‘weeks’ in Daniel 9, then it is logical to apply the same principle to the ‘days’ in the time prophecies found elsewhere in Daniel as well as to the apocalyptic writings of Revelation.”

Even if one rejects Daniel 9 as establishing the day-year principle within Apocalyptic, the historical sequence of Daniel 2 already establishes the historicist hermeneutic, which is recapitulated in Daniel 7, with more detail and a prophetic time period. The prophecy in Daniel 7:25 contains the same time period which is referred to in other apocalyptic prophecies, namely Dan. 12:7, Rev. 11:2, Rev. 11:3, 7, Rev. 12:6, Rev. 12:14–15, Rev. 13:5–7, “variously expressed as a time, times, and ½ a time; a time, 2 times, and ½ a time; 42 months; or 1260 days” (De Kock, 2019:314). In each of these time periods, “a malignant being (a dragon, great serpent, beast, Little Horn, or nation) in desecration tramples underfoot, conquers, wears out, pursues, or kills the holy city, the saints, a righteous woman, or holy witnesses for an identical period” (De Kock, 2019:314). De Kock (2019:314) observes that these “verses do not describe a single opposing power, yet they all refer to closely related aspects of a cosmic war between the Lord Jesus and his enemy, Satan...” Historicists have mostly agreed over the centuries that all of these time periods refer to one historical time span, 1 260 years.

²⁶⁴ Shea has exegetically refuted this. See Shea (1982:74–79). Shea (1982:75) argues that a “reason for this approach in translation is to separate the 70-week prophecy of Daniel 9 from the other time prophecies of the book and to place it in a distinct class by itself. The effect of this is to blunt the implications of the year-day principle advocated by the historicist system of interpretation. If the year-day principle is thus denied its function in the interpretation of Daniel 9:24–27” then interpreters “are at liberty to deny its application to the other time prophecies.”

²⁶⁵ Shea (1982:77) explains that “[t]he seven-day week provided the model upon which the symbolic units of that time period were based.”

With reference to section 4.2.4 (70th week of Daniel 9), De Kock shows that it is not feasible to interpret this time reference literally; hence, it should be interpreted symbolically. In line herewith, De Kock (2019:318) declares that “[e]quating a day with a year is indispensable to the Historical School of interpretation, for obviously literal days and weeks or even months cannot span the centuries.” Moreover, besides this historicist notion is the textual fact of Daniel 7’s apocalyptic descriptions that can only be taken symbolically, “using imagery to depict other truths” (Goldstein, 2018:11). Among the images of a “lion with eagle’s wings”, “a beast with four heads” and “a horn that speaks blasphemy and makes war against God’s people, we find a time prophecy” (Goldstein, 2018:11). Goldstein (2018:11) poses, “[I]f the other images in the vision are symbolic, why take the time period literally,²⁶⁶ instead of as symbolically as the rest of the vision itself was?” Evidently, “the biblical author did not write the time prophecy of Daniel 7:25 in the manner one would use to depict literal time because he did not mean literal time” (Goldstein, 2018:11).

Referring to Daniel 7, Goldstein (2018:11) concludes that “in a chapter that begins in late seventh century B.C. and extends to the present – even beyond – the first apocalyptic time prophecy in Daniel 7 depicts an event important enough not only to be included but to be clearly delineated by its time span.” In conclusion, Shea’s (1982:86) commentary on symbolic or literal should be taken seriously: “The importance in salvation history of the events involved in these apocalyptic prophecies also emphasizes the point that longer than literal time periods are necessary for their accomplishment.”

5.2.6 The Antichrist system

When historicism studies and interprets what the Antichrist precisely is, one needs to remember that the “cosmic controversy worldview needs to be the overarching metanarrative in which to rightly interpret all Scripture” (Gulley, 2016:602). In this context,

²⁶⁶ Goldstein (2018:11) explains that “the phrase time, times, and half a time is not a common way in the Bible to express literal time. All through Scripture, when the writers meant literal time, they just said it literally, such as: ‘Once every three years the merchant ships came bringing gold, silver, ivory, apes, and monkeys’ (1 Kings 10:22). Or, ‘Then I will command My blessing on you in the sixth year, and it will bring forth produce enough for three years’ (Lev. 25:21).”

we should note that “[r]ebellion against God is an attack on Him” and that “[r]ebellion and disinformation about God began with Satan and continues until the final judgment” (Gulley, 2016:xxii). This “final judgment”, according to Gulley (2011:289), “will bring resolution to the war, for all will agree that God is right and Satan’s charge wrong” for in “the cosmic controversy, victory is over Satan” (Gulley, 2016:31). From this perspective, Gulley (2016:616) warns that the “worship of the beast” has “to do with aligning with the wrong side of the cosmic controversy between Christ and Satan.”

Bible scholars have seen the uprising of the Antichrist power not far from Paul’s day with reference to his warning in Acts 20:29–30: “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.”

Section 5.3.4 will deal with Paul’s prophecy about this coming Antichrist that will position itself in the place of God. Important to this notion is De Kock’s (2019:218) observation that “[i]n writing of the Antichrist, Paul did not suggest the lawless one would create an atheistic system”; “on the contrary, he would arise within the church itself.” To trace this uprising, history should be consulted.

Gulley (2016:434) informs that for “the first three centuries, the Christian church was persecuted.” This radically changed when “Constantine ‘converted’²⁶⁷ to Christianity” and “the persecuted church became powerful” (Gulley, 2016:434). De Kock (2013:154) observes that “[i]n those days and from its earliest period, even before it became an empire, Rome was a pagan theocracy.” LaRondelle (2007:173) notes that “[d]uring the first three-hundred years of Christianity, Christians were outlawed because the Roman Emperors, in their office as Pontifex Maximus (“Supreme Pontiff”), protected the state religion for the sake of civil unity in Roman society.” Gulley (2016:434) describes that “[u]nder the rule of Constantine the Great (c. 275–337), Christianity came into favor with the Roman Empire.” But his “motive was political, to unite his empire of multiple religions” for it seems that he “must have been impressed with the growing influence of Christianity.”

²⁶⁷ Gulley (2016:435) states, “Evidence calls into question Constantine’s conversion to Christianity.”

True to the Roman system, “Constantine established a virtual theocracy. Into it, he brought the religious prerogatives” (De Kock, 2012:91).

After his conversion, Constantine, at “the battle of the Milvian Bridge,” according to De Kock (2013:154), “added Christ to his pantheon, which soon was to lay the groundwork for a Catholic-Orthodox theocracy.” This resulted in “the fatal alliance between Caesar and Pope, Throne and Altar” (De Kock, 2013:154). Gulley (2016:434) reports that “Clergy recognized in this new order ‘a reproduction of the theocratic constitution of the people of God under the ancient covenant,’ except dissenting sects received no benefit and were ‘subject to persecution from the state and from the established Catholicism.’” Gulley (2016:434) indicates that the ensuing result was that the Roman Church “fared well in the union with the state, while other churches (dubbed sects) were persecuted by church and state.” According to De Kock (2013:154), “tolerance” was “never accepted by the Catholic church. Truth, she insisted, can never be compromised. Hence whenever she was in control, she denied freedom of religion to others.” Gulley (2016:435) explains that “[e]arly champions for freedom of conscience (Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and Lactantius) were ignored as the union of church and state restricted ‘religious freedom’.” Moreover, Gulley (2016:435) reminds that “[h]eretics were not only excommunicated from church but considered criminals against the state.” Gulley (2016:435) further observes that “in the middle ages, the Roman Church persecuted, even with death, those disagreeing with her dogmas.”

To LaRondelle’s (2007:174) logical deduction, “Constantine ‘seated Christianity on the throne of the Roman world’ ... Since Constantine, the church became the state-church.” In identifying the beast power from Revelation that most commentators recognise as the Antichrist power, Finley (2020:301) asks, “What is this power symbolized” by “a beast from the sea in Revelation?” He (2020:301) answers that it is “the medieval church of Rome” which fell “into apostasy and gross spiritual darkness.” He then sets out with careful analysis of the biblical data in light of history to prove that this is the case. In support, Finley (2020:301) refers to “the dragon in Revelation 12” which “attempted to destroy ‘as soon as it was born’ the ‘male Child’ who was later ‘caught up to God and to His throne’ – referring to Christ.” Finley (2020:301) establishes that “the dragon in a

secondary sense was the pagan Roman Empire” as it attempted “to destroy the ‘male Child’” through “King Herod, Rome’s agent.” Finley (2020:302) also points out that it was “pagan Rome” that crucified Christ²⁶⁸ and it was “pagan Rome” who “gave the beast his seat, or throne.” Finley finds that this is exactly what happened in history. He finds that this “happened when the Roman emperor Constantine decided to move the capital from Rome to what came to be called Constantinople” (Finley, 2020:302). The result was that this “left a power vacuum at the former throne, or seat, of the Caesars, the imperial city of Rome” (Finley, 2020:302). Finley (2020:302) refers to church historian Arthur Stanley who wrote, “By retiring to the East he [Constantine] left the field clear for the Bishops of Rome... The Papacy is but ‘the ghost’ of the deceased Roman Empire, sitting crowned upon the ‘grave thereof’.” In addition, Finley (2020:302) refers to Baldassare Labanca, history professor at the University of Rome, who asserted that “[t]o the succession of the Caesars came the succession of the pontiffs in Rome.”

Examining history, Peth (1988:680) states the following in this regard:

Emperor Justinian (reigning from Constantinople in the East, since Constantine had moved the capital from Rome to Constantinople) issued his imperial letter elevating the bishop of Rome to be the ‘Head of all the holy churches’ in A.D. 533.

However, Peth (1988:680) points out that there had been a challenge: While “Justinian’s decree laid the legal foundation for Papal supremacy, it couldn’t actually go into effect until the heretical Arian powers were removed.” Forcible removal was the only option in Justinian’s mind, so he “sent his armies, under General Belisarius, first into North Africa against the Arian Vandals, conquering them in A.D. 534” (Peth, 1988:680). Afterwards, a second army “moved into Italy and succeeded in driving the Goths from Rome in March, 538” (Peth, 1988:680). Peth (1988:680) clarifies that “[o]nly then, when Ostrogothic control was removed, could the Roman Pontiff be free to exercise his jurisdiction.” Clearly

²⁶⁸ Finley (2020:302) explains, “A *Roman* governor, Pilate, condemned Christ to die (Matthew 27:2, 17–26). A *Roman* executioner nailed Him to the cruel cross (verses 27,35). A *Roman* soldier pierced His heart with a spear (John 19:34). A *Roman* seal was affixed to His tomb (Matthew 27:66). A *Roman* squad of soldiers guarded His tomb (verses 62–65).”

then, “the period of Papal dominance began in the year 538” (Peth, 1988:680). In Revelation 12, “after Calvary (Rev. 12:9–13), Satan ‘pursued the woman’ for 1,260 years²⁶⁹ during the Dark Ages, from 538 to 1798 (Rev. 12:6, 14),” according to Gulley (2016:104). Peth (1988:680) confirms that “[a]dding 1260 years to 538 brings us to 1798” and subsequently, he logically asks, “Did anything happen in that year to bring the period of Papal supremacy to an end?” The answer is set in history, for “in 1798 Napoleon’s general entered Rome and took the Pope captive” (Peth, 1988:680). History teaches that the “Pontiff was dethroned, imprisoned, and exiled in France, where he soon died” (Peth 1988:680).

The Apocalypse foresaw this mortal wound to this beast power in Revelation 13:3: “And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast.”

Note that this power will rise again with global influence. This will be dealt with in more detail in section 5.2.8. Of note, though, is that when speaking about the Antichrist, Scripture is “talking about a system,” for the “beast is not a person; it is false religious organization” as it is a combination of state and church (Finley, 2020:302). This organisation is, according to De Kock (2019:141), “an ecclesiastical system” that “would dangerously amalgamate religious and secular power” (De Kock, 2019:207) as a “worldruling papal theocracy” (De Kock, 2013:502), defining it as “the Antichristian system” (De Kock, 2019:288). The historic results speak for themselves. LaRondelle (2007:174) critiques “[t]he dark side of this historic alliance of church and state since Constantine was the persecution of ‘heretics’” on the grounds that “their departures from the state-church faith... were considered not just religious errors, but as crimes against the... state.”

Some may criticise such identification of the Roman Church with the evil label of ‘Antichrist’. But, in the words of De Kock (2019:202), “we make a clear distinction between individuals and the system,” for it “is the system that is wrong” (De Kock, 2019:220) and therefore “should not be construed as an attack on individual Roman Catholics” (De Kock,

²⁶⁹ See section 5.2.5 *Day-year principle*.

2019:286). Proving that this has nothing to do with good Christian Catholic people, is the fact that it was not only the Roman Church that instituted a theocracy that resulted in persecution; Protestants did the same when they obtained civil power. In section 5.2.8 it will be seen that Protestants will be foremost in establishing the predicted theocratic antichrist system predicted by Revelation 13. Gulley (2016:435–436) concurs that “the bad results of the union of church and state were not only in the Roman Church but in Protestant churches as well.” A fitting illustration may be that of the Geneva experiment by some main Protestants. Gulley (2016:436) notes that “[t]he union of church and state in Geneva made it a theocracy” and describes it as a “marriage between Calvin’s theology and its control of the state.” Gulley (2016:436) quotes Schaff who asserts that “Calvin extended the authority and duty of civil government to both Tables of the Law.”²⁷⁰ Usually, the state “confines its jurisdiction to the second table, but the union of state and church extended the jurisdiction of the state to all Ten Commandments” (Gulley, 2016:436). Again quoting Schaff, Gulley (2016:436) explains that this “meant that ‘offences against the Church are offences against the State, and vice versa, and deserve punishment by fines, imprisonment, exile, and, if necessary, by death.’” The outcome of this experiment was that the “church in Geneva was a ‘state church’” (Gulley, 2016:436), which translated that “it was the duty of the state to legislate beyond its civil responsibilities” as well as “to legislate in religious matters as well” (Gulley, 2016:436).

Protestants to “escape this persecution” fled “to the ‘New World’ – a land that later became the United States” (Gulley, 2016:439). Gulley (2016:439) points out that, sadly, “those persecuted by the Catholic Church in medieval Europe (Magisterial Reformers) took with them the same persecuting power against other Protestants,” and so “this history was repeated in the ‘New World,’ where pilgrims of one church persuasion used the state to persecute pilgrims of another church persuasion.” According to Gulley (2016:441), “[t]he Puritans were Calvinists and could be intolerant, and it is well known that they had ‘a theology of Divine sovereignty rather than Divine love’,” with the result

²⁷⁰ Gulley (2016:436) identifies that “[t]he first table (commandments 1–4; Exod. 20:2–11) refers to one’s relationship to God (religious matters). The second table (commandments 5–10; Exod. 20:12–17) refers to one’s relationship to humans (civil matters).”

that “they wanted to establish a theocracy in the New World as Calvin had in Geneva, and this included a number of rigid rules.” De Kock (2019:346) declares that “Protestants made laws to establish their own churches. Boston became a second Geneva, the center of a theocracy” where “[d]issenters were punished, often very harshly.” De Kock (2019:346) quotes Vandeman who states, “Unbelief was a crime. Faith was enforced by law. Believe it or not, certain religious offenses were even punishable by death.” De Kock (2019:346) further reveals that “[a]ccording to Clifford Goldstein, Quakers had an especially bad time of it. The Baptists also suffered much” for “they ‘were beaten, exiled, mobbed, fined, and jailed, most often for refusal to obtain a license to preach, refusal to attend established churches, or refusal to pay taxes to established religion.’” Gulley (2016:439) states, “Eventually the cause of religious freedom was birthed in the ‘New World’ and led to the writing of the American Constitution, where religious freedom, through the appropriate separation of church and state, ushered in a new era of church history.”

5.2.7 Second Coming

The whole focus of eschatology is the coming eschaton where the *eschatos* will come himself “not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” (Hebrews 9:28, ESV). Historicists believe that “[t]he second coming of Christ is the blessed hope of the church, the grand climax of the gospel.”²⁷¹ In contrast to the spiritual comings of preterism and that of futurism’s secret rapture, “[t]he Saviour’s coming will be literal, personal, visible, and worldwide.”²⁷² In expectation, historicists look forward in the hope that “[w]hen He returns, the righteous dead will be resurrected, and together with the righteous living will be glorified and taken to heaven, but the unrighteous will die.”²⁷³ According to the Apocalypse, it is maintained that “[t]he almost complete fulfillment of

²⁷¹ Seventh-day Adventist Church n.d., *The Second Coming of Christ*, Seventh-day Adventist Church, viewed 23 July 2020, <<https://www.adventist.org/en/beliefs/restoration/the-second-coming-of-christ/>>

²⁷² Seventh-day Adventist Church n.d., *The Second Coming of Christ*, Seventh-day Adventist Church, viewed 23 July 2020, <<https://www.adventist.org/en/beliefs/restoration/the-second-coming-of-christ/>>

²⁷³ Seventh-day Adventist Church n.d., *The Second Coming of Christ*, Seventh-day Adventist Church, viewed 23 July 2020, <<https://www.adventist.org/en/beliefs/restoration/the-second-coming-of-christ/>>

most lines of prophecy, together with the present condition of the world, indicates that Christ's coming is near."²⁷⁴ Yet, one should live in faith towards this hope as "[t]he time of that event has not been revealed, and we are therefore exhorted to be ready at all times."²⁷⁵

The second coming starts the millennium when Christ binds Satan for a thousand years (Rev 19:21; 20:1). "The millennium is the thousand-year reign of Christ with His saints in heaven between the first and second resurrections"²⁷⁶ as Christ takes the saved to heaven with his Second Coming. During the millennium, "the wicked dead will be judged; the earth will be utterly desolate, without living human inhabitants, but occupied by Satan and his angels."²⁷⁷ In heaven, as also after the millennium (as will be seen shortly), Christ is busy answering "the charges of Satan in the controversy" as "to restore the universe to its pre-controversy status" (Gulley, 2016:645). At the close of the millennium, "Christ with His saints and the Holy City will descend from heaven to earth."²⁷⁸ "The unrighteous dead will then be resurrected, and with Satan and his angels will surround the city,"²⁷⁹ but God will rise on his throne in full display of all to execute the last judgment. He will reveal himself and how he provided full salvation in Christ in invitation to all through the Holy Spirit to come into a personal relationship with him. But here they stand now in judgment because they rejected God. Gulley (2003:442) assures that "[t]his invitation to a

²⁷⁴ Seventh-day Adventist Church n.d., *The Second Coming of Christ*, Seventh-day Adventist Church, viewed 23 July 2020, <<https://www.adventist.org/en/beliefs/restoration/the-second-coming-of-christ/>>

²⁷⁵ Seventh-day Adventist Church n.d., *The Second Coming of Christ*, Seventh-day Adventist Church, viewed 23 July 2020, <<https://www.adventist.org/en/beliefs/restoration/the-second-coming-of-christ/>>

²⁷⁶ Seventh-day Adventist Church n.d., *The Millennium and the End of Sin*, Seventh-day Adventist Church, viewed 23 July 2020, < <https://www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental-beliefs/restoration/the-millennium-and-the-end-of-sin/>>

²⁷⁷ Seventh-day Adventist Church n.d., *The Millennium and the End of Sin*, Seventh-day Adventist Church, viewed 23 July 2020, < <https://www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental-beliefs/restoration/the-millennium-and-the-end-of-sin/>>

²⁷⁸ Seventh-day Adventist Church n.d., *The Millennium and the End of Sin*, Seventh-day Adventist Church, viewed 23 July 2020, < <https://www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental-beliefs/restoration/the-millennium-and-the-end-of-sin/>>

²⁷⁹ Seventh-day Adventist Church n.d., *The Millennium and the End of Sin*, Seventh-day Adventist Church, viewed 23 July 2020, < <https://www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental-beliefs/restoration/the-millennium-and-the-end-of-sin/>>

relationship with God is holistic, involving the total person. It has to do with the mind and the heart, it is propositional and personal, and it involves a full response to God in worship and witness.” Therefore, in the final judgment, God will not just declare judgment and punishment but appeal to the mind and heart. Gulley (2003:442) asserts that it “is in this relationship context that the only true God accommodates to the level of human thinking.” This relation is “an accommodated self-revelation that meets us in the incarnation and in inspiration” (Gulley, 2003:442). That is why God will reveal his character in the final judgment for it “is this self-revelation of God that shows fallen humans that He is a God of love and justice” (Gulley, 2003:442). This is the reason why “at the great white throne judgment self-revelation of God, all humans, redeemed and lost, will respond that He is just (Isa. 45:23b; Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:10–11; Rev. 5:13; 15:3; 19:1–6)” (Gulley, 2003:442). Gulley (2003:xxv) challenges that “all humans, whether they know it or not, are involved in the cosmic controversy and will be included in the final judgment when the issue is resolved with their participation.” Notably, “[t]he issue in the controversy is not merely whether we accept God, but whether we accept Him as He reveals Himself as a God of love and justice” (Gulley, 2003:xxiii). Gulley (2011:289) holds that this “final judgment will bring resolution to the war, for all will agree that God is right and Satan’s charge wrong, and Satan, sin, and sinners will be destroyed, so that the former things will be gone (Rev. 21:1–4)” after everyone, including Satan and his host, has bent the knee and confessed with the tongue (Phil. 2:9–11). Gulley (2003:446) believes that this is the “climax of the cosmic controversy, when the devil and his angels as well as all rebel humans are annihilated.” Gulley (2011:289) further observes that only “[t]hen a new heaven and a new earth can be launched in which no one will ever question God again (Nah. 1:9), for who could do so in the light of the life and death of Christ?”

Gulley (2003:446) contends that “[t]he controversy that began in heaven and spread to Earth is now forever over.” After this fiery cleansing, “[t]he new heaven and new earth bring the universe to a new level of existence, where God’s love has been demonstrated in the life and death of Jesus” (Gulley, 2003:446). Gulley (2003:446) points out that without “this revelation of God to the universe, there would not be as great a comprehension of His love” in this setting of the cosmic controversy which “is also an

unfolding story from paradise lost to paradise regained” (Gulley, 2003:108). Gulley (2016:707) states that now for eternity all that remains is “one eternal life – a vibrant, joyous relationship with the relational Trinity who went through all the suffering of the cosmic controversy because He loves humans so unselfishly.”

From henceforth, Gulley (2016:707) finds that “[t]he controversy can never arise again because it is impossible in the light of Calvary” for Gulley (2012:650) states that “the cosmic contribution of Calvary” was “to secure the universe from another controversy arising in the future, because all created beings will be in awe of the awesome sacrifice of Christ on the cross.” In other words, “Christ’s death” defeated “the cosmic controversy so that it will never arise again in the eternal future” (Gulley, 2012:650). Within this context, Gulley (2016:707) declares that for eternity, “[n]o one can ever do less than love Christ and the Trinity more and more as they study the profound depths of the self-sacrificing love of the Crucified One.” Therefore, “[t]hroughout eternity, love for God will increase, as new dimensions of their love are revealed in an ongoing study of Calvary that will never end” and the “joy of the redeemed will ever increase as they comprehend greater depths of God’s love for each one of them” (Gulley, 2016:707).

5.2.8 Prophetic mission: religious liberty and freedom of conscience

The forthflowing result of historicism is the global admonishing of the world against a prophesied coming theocracy within the “overarching metanarrative” of the “cosmic controversy worldview” (Gulley, 2016:602). Against the background of preterism and futurism’s proposal of, and ideological grassroots movements towards such an establishment of a theocratic nature, as seen in sections 3.2.7 and 4.2.7, this global prophetic mission against such a prophesied coming theocracy is fitting.

Gulley (2016:433) observes that Christians are “concerned about the lack of Judeo-Christian values in contemporary society, such as the absence of God, Scripture, and prayer in the upbringing of so many youth” (and all “the anti-Christian values that daily confront them).” Their argument is that “if Christian legislation can prevail, things will get better” (Gulley, 2016:433,434). Therefore, “[m]any Christians associate the union of church and state with ‘taking America back for God’” (Gulley, 2016:434). Some revert to

the argument that “America was birthed” by Christians “where church and state were united (as in Massachusetts and Connecticut and later in other colonies)” (Gulley, 2016:434). Other Christians argue “that America became a Christian nation in 1776 when it gained its independence from Britain and was founded on freedom and inalienable rights” viewing “the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution as grounds for claiming America has always been a Christian nation” (Gulley, 2016:434).

In sections 3.2.7 and 4.2.7 it was observed that the outflowing results of preterism and futurism are theological paradigms devoted to assisting in the establishment of a Christian theocratic system in order to insert God back into government and society, despite the viewpoints, worldviews or convictions of others. In contrast, historicism endeavours to warn about the implications of such a system by upholding and presenting a prophetic message of religious liberty where God provides everyone with free will and freedom of choice without any coercion because of divine love. Therefore, “God in His infinite love and impartiality sends three messages to warn the world of the urgent need to decide about truth and error,” according to Gulley (2016:559), where humanity has the freedom “to choose between God’s side and Satan’s side of the cosmic controversy.” Gulley (2016:559) assures that in light of the impending theocracy agenda, “[t]hese messages go to the whole world.” Finley (2020:315) provides background to these prophetic messages by stating that “God has always sent messages to prepare people for significant events that affect their eternal destiny” and observes it to be strange “if God did not have a special message for the people” confronted with such an apocalyptic challenge. The author believes that the symbolic three angels representing a prophetic message “in Revelation 14 proclaim messages of the greatest significance” as it is a divine appeal to the world to “decide whether they will conform” (Finley, 2020:316). Gulley (2016:559) presents these prophetic messages to “constitute the end-time conclusion of Christ’s Great Commission to take the gospel to the world (Matt. 28:19–20).”

The Seventh-day Adventist Church believes it her duty to present these prophetic messages to the world and has proclaimed for 140 years about a coming theocracy which should be resisted in the context of the cosmic controversy and divine sovereignty and love. Since 1906, the SDA Church has been publishing the leading magazine on religious

liberty called *Liberty*, with a bi-monthly circulation of almost 200 000. It is founded upon the following principles that are reflected in all its articles:

The God-given right of religious liberty is best exercised when church and state are separate. Government is God's agency to protect individual rights and to conduct civil affairs; in exercising these responsibilities, officials are entitled to respect and cooperation. Religious liberty entails freedom of conscience: to worship or not to worship; to profess, practice and promulgate religious beliefs or to change them. In exercising these rights, however, one must respect the equivalent rights of all others.

Attempts to unite church and state are opposed to the interests of each, subversive of human rights and potentially persecuting in character; to oppose union, lawfully and honorably, is not only the citizen's duty but the essence of the Golden Rule – to treat others as one wishes to be treated.²⁸⁰

So, what should the relationship be between state and church? Gulley (2016:432) proposes that “[w]ith respect to a connection between church and state, the Judeo-Christian heritage provides something valuable to the state compared to atheism because it upholds biblical values.” With reference to the church, Gulley (2016:432) suggests that it “can receive advantages from the state such as tax exemption, protection of property, recognition of ministers and marriages, freedom to preach, and religious liberty.” He believes that “[w]hen the two are kept separate, state and church are free from the temptation to repress each other, and the state remains neutral, not favoring one religion over another” (Gulley, 2016:432). Gulley (2016:432) presents the two distinct spheres of influence and domains as that “[t]he state is free to legislate in civil matters, and church members are free to follow the dictates of their conscience.”

²⁸⁰ Liberty Magazine n.d., *About Us & Contact*, Liberty Magazine, viewed 28 July 2020, <<https://www.libertymagazine.org/about>>

5.2.9 Construction of the key historicist teachings

In conclusion, Figure 5.3 below shows how historicism is constructed upon the foundation of the Apocalyptic principle in Daniel 2 and the floorwork of divine sovereignty and love. Historicism is further framed within the cosmic controversy narrative wherein its four main pillars of redemptive history, day-year principle, Antichrist system and Second Coming find their orientation and meaning. These four pillars provide the scope and argument for historicism's prophetic mission in which it is believed that religious liberty and freedom of conscience should be proclaimed on behalf of all religions and non-believers in a global admonishing against a prophesied coming theocracy.

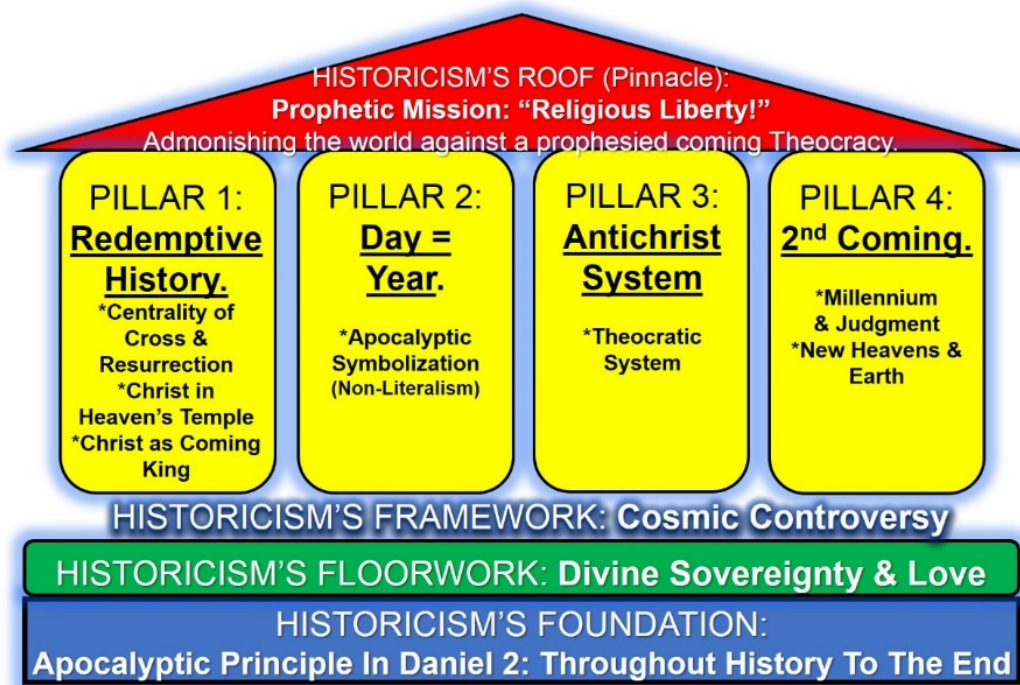


Figure 5.3 The construction of historicism

5.3 HISTORICISM ANALYSED

In this section, historicism will be analysed against the criteria of the five-tier analysis model proposed in Chapter 2 to determine whether this interpretation school reveals a theologically adequate hermeneutical approach towards apocalyptic prophecy.

5.3.1 A Christological analysis of historicism

As indicated earlier, it is imperative to ask of any apocalyptic interpretation school whether it is Christological. By utilising the Christological Analysis proposed in Chapter 2, it will now be determined whether historicism is indeed Christological.

(i) Christ as Prophet

As to Christ as Prophet, historicism does reveal Christ as a prophet. Gulley (2011:198), in relating to “God’s inner-Trinitarian history with its eternal, reciprocal, sequential give-and-take of love” and the “acts of God” in history, identifies that consequently God sent “Jesus Christ into time in historical sequence as prophet, priest, and king.” The Old Testament is pregnant in full expectancy of a divine coming prophet. Andreasen (1987, as cited in Olsen, 1987:18) notes that “[r]eaders of the New Testament know of a Messianic expectation associated with a prophet to come.” The author traces this expectation back to Deuteronomy 18:15 which “falls in a section of that book dealing with three appointed leaders: the king (chap. 17:14–20), the priests (chap. 18:1–8), and the prophet (verses 15–22)” (Andreasen, 1987, as cited in Olsen, 1987:18). Commenting on this passage, Andreasen (1987, as cited in Olsen, 1987:18) suggests that “assurance is given us that God Himself will raise up a prophet to speak His word to the people.” He clarifies that the text notes that “[t]his prophet will be like Moses, who also was charged to announce God’s word to the people from Mount Sinai (Ex. 20:18–20; Deut. 5:22–27)” (Andreasen, 1987, as cited in Olsen, 1987:18). Moreover, the author indicates that “chapter 18:15 clearly promises more than merely a sequence of prophets” (Andreasen, 1987, as cited in Olsen, 1987:19). He also points out that “Moses serves as a model for the promised prophet, particularly with reference to this role as spokesman” (Andreasen, 1987, as cited in Olsen, 1987:18).

Andreasen (1987, as cited in Olsen, 1987:19) further discovers that “[a]s a second Moses, the prophet to come as lawgiver and mediator between God and man belongs to the future.” Pereyra (1981:13) upholds that “that prophet whom Moses declared would arise like unto himself” is Jesus Christ. In similar fashion, Andreasen (1987, as cited in Olsen, 1987:19) maintains that Christ “is the eschatological prophet” and argues that “[t]hat hope

was fulfilled by Jesus Christ when He stood on the Mount of Blessing and announced the word of God, the law, and the promises, to His people (Matt. 5–7).” It was also demonstrated when, according to Towar (2019:23), “Christ went to Nazareth” and quoted “the words of the prophet Isaiah.” Quoted from Isa. 61:1–2, Luke 4:18–19 reads,

The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

With regard to the Incarnated Christ, historicism does reveal Christ in his incarnation. Gulley (2012:417) reasons that “[o]nly God can accomplish the redeeming-resolving work necessary to restore the universe to its pre-Fall existence.” Salvation, according to Gulley (2012:417), “required God to come to this rebel planet, to enter the battle zone, to become sin itself, and die for humans.” Gulley (2012:417) explains that the “problem of sin could not be solved by a fiat act of God,”²⁸¹ for the problem is rooted deep within creation where “created beings who have joined the rebellion and have become sinful – separated from God.” Therefore, “God needed to become human, for the Creator must become a part of creation in order to reclaim it from sin and resolve the cosmic controversy” (Gulley, 2012:417).

Gulley’s (2016:264) commentary on apocalyptic and eschatology finds that “[i]f the incarnation of Christ was not into genuine human flesh, He could never be our intercessor in heaven’s sanctuary,” which plays a foundational role in the Apocalypse. Gulley (2016:264) cautions that one “must keep in balance two realities,” namely that “Christ entered into human flesh” and that “He remained sinless divinity.” The author reasons that “[t]he incarnation united human flesh affected (not infected) by sin with a sinless divine nature” and finds that “[t]he two need to be held together” (Gulley, 2016:264). When salvation is viewed from another angle, “only a sinless God could reach down and rescue humans from sin” for the reason that “He has omnipotent ability to save us because He is God, and He has human experience because He lived a genuine human life and died

²⁸¹ Gulley (2012:417) elucidates a fiat act of God “such as He did in creating out of nothing.”

as a human” (Gulley, 2016:264). But seeing that death was needed to atone, Gulley (2016:264) reminds that “[d]ivinity cannot die, for God alone is immortal (1 Tim. 6:16a).” This then means that “even God could not save humans if He was not really human in His life and in His death” (Gulley, 2016:265), for only humans can die. “But because He was God, His life and death in human flesh was able to save all humans if they accept His gift of salvation” (Gulley, 2016:265).

Concerning salvation, it is critical to understand that “it takes Christ’s divinity and humanity to save humans” (Gulley, 2016:265). Christ was “qualified to save” since he was “fully God and fully human” (Gulley, 2016:265). Salvation is therefore “uniquely God’s doing from beginning to end” (Gulley, 2016:265). The only conclusion then is that his “incarnation was necessary” (Gulley, 2016:265).

Concerning the Crucified Christ, historicism does reveal Christ as the crucified. Maxwell (1985:209) finds that of “all the symbols of Himself” that Christ “might have chosen in Revelation, He chose the Passover lamb.” This “designation occurs twenty-nine times,” according to Maxwell (1985:209) within the Apocalypse. Gulley (2016:655) maintains that “the return of Christ” is rooted “in a past event of Christ,” namely the event of the “God-Man hanging from the cross” with Jesus crying out when the end²⁸² came, “It is finished” (John 19:30) (Gulley, 2016:655). The author assesses that this “puts history into a completely different perspective” (Gulley, 2016:655).

Gulley (2016:655) extols that “this Man came from outside history to bring to humankind that which they do not have in themselves and therefore could not work out by themselves.” This invasion into history eliminates “the ultimate despair of humankind” for “[h]istory is not careening off course toward a nuclear holocaust” (Gulley, 2016:655). The crucified Christ changed destiny, according to Gulley (2016:655), where history “is not under the mushroom cloud but beneath the fallout of Calvary.” Gulley (2016:655) portrays history as now moving “relentlessly toward this rendezvous with destiny – to meet Christ” for this “Man shatters all possibilities – for good or evil – that humans are in control of their own future.” Now, according to Gulley (2016:655), “[h]uman destiny is grounded in

²⁸² Gulley (2016:655) explains that this “is why Scripture repeatedly speaks of the end as already come.”

the life and work” of the crucified Christ. Gulley (2016:656) considers that “Christians live between the times, between the time of Calvary and the Second Advent” and therefore surmises that one “must never study the cross without the Second Advent nor the Second Advent without the cross.”

Gulley (1996:21) writes that “[n]ot until we realize what Christ has saved us from will we realize the wonder of the cross.” He believes that “[w]hen we comprehend the cost of Calvary, we will understand Christ as our Substitute, our Salvation, and our Righteousness” (Gulley, 1996:21). Gulley (1996:21) further articulates that “[t]hat death is our life” for by and through “Calvary, the love of Christ constrains us (2 Corinthians 5:14), so that we eagerly follow Him because we love Him (John 14:15). This is righteousness by faith lived out in love.” It is through the crucified Christ “that we penetrate to the depths of God’s love for all the universe, and not just for humanity” (Gulley, (2003:446). Gulley (1996:21) proposes that “the sum total of all the (atonement) theories fails to do justice to what is known of Calvary now, let alone the eternal revelation of Calvary yet to come.” The author declares that “Calvary is an infinite subject that will take an infinite eternity to understand” (Gulley, 1996:21). Hence, he accentuates that “with the passing of eternity, the magnitude of the content of Calvary will be ever unfolding without end” (Gulley, 1996:21).

(ii) Christ as Priest

About the Resurrected Christ, historicism does reveal Christ as the resurrected. Commenting on Revelation 1, Maxwell (1985:76) asserts that “Jesus is our Resurrection as well as Life” for our life “in Him is eternal, not because we never” die but because “we shall be resurrected” by the risen Christ “at the second coming on the last day.” Quoting Christ’s words to John on Patmos, “I died ... and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades” (Revelation 1:18), Maxwell (1985:76) underlines that “Christ’s own death and resurrection are our evidence, our guarantee, that Christ has truly vanquished death.” The author contends that the words in Matthew 28:6, “He is not here for he has risen,” is the “triumphant cry repeated every Easter sunrise” which illustrates that “[e]very one of our hopes is vested in the magnificent Easter reality” (Maxwell,

1985:76). He supports this by quoting Paul who reasoned firmly, “If Christ has *not* been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins...” (Maxwell, 1985:76).

Gulley (2016:655) insists that “[t]he world moves inexorably toward the unfolding of what has already been fully realized in the life of Jesus as a Man among humankind.” Within Christ’s life “is wrapped up the decisively determining factor of all human history” for he “brought humanity in Himself through a glorious resurrection to the other side” (Gulley, 2016:655).

In the context of the Victorious Christ, historicism does reveal the victorious Christ. Maxwell (1985:206) highlights that in “the letters to the seven churches, He himself said that He had conquered, and He gave His victory as the reason He was seated on God’s throne.” Further to the context of Revelation 1:18, Maxwell (1985:206) assures that “Jesus conquered sin, death and Satan.” Following Christ’s “victory over sin on the cross and His victorious resurrection over the second death,” according to Mathews (2012:652), he ascended “to heaven, where the Father and the angels live.” On Christ’s return, “He is inaugurated as our Priest/King” and his first act was “to stand in judgment on Satan” resulting “in Satan being limited²⁸³ to this earth” (Mathews, 2012:652).

Commenting on Revelation 5, Mathews (2012:306) describes how it reveals the victorious Christ as “[t]he root of Jesse, the Son of David, the sprout of David, he has prevailed and has the right to open the scroll with the seven seals.” To Mathews (2012:306), “Jesus’ right to open the scroll has been contested by the great imposter, the old serpent, the devil and Satan – that pretender to the throne,” but “Jesus has prevailed and has come out of the great controversy victorious.”

At the Father’s throne stands the victorious Christ for he “is that promised king of the Davidic lineage,” according to Mathews (2012:306), and he “is the true heir to the Davidic throne.” In this victorious Christ “is found the fulfillment of all the hopes and expectations of God’s people of both the Old and New Testament covenant” (Mathews, 2012:306).

²⁸³ Now that Christ was crowned as victorious, Satan could be limited to this earth for according to Mathews (2012:651) “[t]he character of God was openly revealed at the cross, by the sacrifice of His Son. The character of Satan was openly revealed at the cross, in the hatred he had shown for God’s Son. No longer was there any excuse or reason for Satan to be among the ‘sons of God’ at the councils.”

Finley (2020:416) concludes that “[e]very prophecy in Revelation ultimately ends in the same place – with Christ as the victor.”

In the matter of Christ as Priest, in contrast to preterism and futurism, historicism does reveal Christ as priest. In reference to Revelation 8, Mathews (2012:423) clarifies that the “incense is a symbol of the merits and intercession of Jesus Christ, which, when added to the prayers of the saints, make them acceptable and fragrant before the throne of God.” Christ as priest “adds His merits, His intercession, to our prayers,” according to Mathews (2012:423), where “we don’t even have to pray, [for] He will even take our groans – those non-verbal expressions of grief or pain or cries for help – and make something out of them (Romans 8:26).” Mathews (2012:423) describes how “heaven takes those groanings that cannot be uttered and – adding to them the intercession of Jesus – that eloquent appeal of Jesus Christ our great High Priest makes them eloquent to the Father.” Moreover, Mathews (2012:132) discovers that the Apocalypse presents how “we have access to the throne of God, praying to our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary, who has everything we will ever need for our spiritual lives on this earth” from Christ’s ascension to his Second Coming.

Historicism’s view of Christ as priest in an ongoing ministry through the ages, even at this very moment, takes divine love seriously, a love which came into time to impact our very history. Gulley (2011:442) asserts that those “who accept a timeless God accept a Platonic view of God, which cannot do justice to history, for a God in history experiences sequential moments, rather than being bound by simultaneity.” He explains that “Jesus lived in time on planet earth, and after His mission was completed, He went to heaven,” not to end this entering into our time narrative but “to enter a heavenly ministry in which He acts in time in the heavenly sanctuary just as He acted in time while in His pre-incarnate state when dwelling in the earthly sanctuary and temples” (Gulley, 2011:442). Critical to understand is Gulley’s (2011:442) finding that “[h]istoricism in prophetic interpretation is compatible with Jesus Christ who acts in history on earth and in heaven” for the “plan of salvation unfolds in history on earth and in heaven.”

(iii) Christ as King

As to Christ as King, historicism does reveal Christ as King. Commenting on God's kingdom represented by the stone in Daniel 2, Maxwell (1981:43) defines God's kingdom as "coming in two different phases," the first being the kingdom of grace in which "Christ is a gracious king who forgives repentant sinners" and the second the kingdom of glory where Christ "reigns as a literal king, maintaining world peace and promoting universal prosperity." Maxwell (1981:43) discusses how Christ in his earthly ministry "talked mostly about the kingdom of grace." But Christ "also talked about the future kingdom of glory that Daniel predicted – the kingdom that He will set up after His second coming" (Maxwell, 1981:43). To Maxwell (1981:44), those who have "first let Christ set up His kingdom of grace" in their hearts "will be fit to enter that kingdom."

With reference to Revelation 19:12, Maxwell (1985:489) states that Christ "in John's vision wears 'many diadems,' or kingly crowns." But there are also multiple diadems on the dragon (12:3) and on the beast (13:1), according to Maxwell (1985:489), which is "a blasphemous parody of Christ's kingly authority." Maxwell (1985:489) claims that "Satan is the 'ruler of this world' (John 12:31)," only because he stole "the kingdom from its rightful Lord" which was ransomed at the cross and will be reclaimed at the Second Coming. Furthermore, Maxwell (1985:489) observes that in Revelation one does not see Christ wearing a crown, "except in chapter 14:14" where he "is coming to gather the redeemed." Cooke (2014:loc 12606) explains that "[t]he first description of Jesus in the heavenly temple is found in Revelation 1:12–14, where there is no mention of Him wearing a head covering." He observes that at "that juncture, however, Jesus as High Priest would conceivably be wearing a mitre" but that he now "is instead wearing a golden crown" (Cooke, 2014:loc 12606). The "significance of this is that He is no longer serving as a priest but has rather become a king – the King of kings" (Cooke, 2014:loc 12606).

Endeavouring to determine when Christ started wearing these diadems, Maxwell (1985:489) finds that "Daniel 7:13,14 shows that at the close of the pre-advent phase of the final judgment" Christ "was to receive 'dominion and glory and kingdom' from God the Father, the Ancient of Days" where, according to Cooke (2014:loc 12606), "His kingdom, this world, has been granted to Him, and now He is coming to take possession of it."

Maxwell (1985:489) indicates that “[i]mmediately upon receiving His kingdom in its fullness,” Jesus comes for the subjects of his kingdom, no longer a priest but as King of kings.

Commenting on the phrase ‘King of kings, and Lord of lords’ in Revelation 19:16, Mathews (2012:1022) points out that this “title of the rider is noted in several passages of the Old Testament.”²⁸⁴ He discovers that “The Rider²⁸⁵ is *El Elyon*, of the God above all other gods” where “Jesus is preeminent, the only person in the universe with the right to these names and this kingdom” and emphasises that “[t]he title itself is a superlative appellation from which there is no other higher name” (Mathews, 2012:1022).

Relating to Christ as the Coming Christ, historicism does reveal Christ as the coming Christ. Maxwell (1985:487) emphasises that “[t]he second coming is a major, recurring theme in Revelation...”²⁸⁶ In similar fashion, Gulley (2016:25) points out how the prologue to the Apocalypse indicates that the book is “the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place” (Rev. 1:1), while towards the end of the books it says, “Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book” (Rev. 22:7). He illuminates that “[t]he emphasis throughout is on the imminent coming of Christ, and a blessing is pronounced on all who read the book in order to be prepared for the Second Advent” (Gulley, 2016:25). In addition, Guy (1987:211) reveals that “[a]ccording to an Adventist understanding of the Biblical revelation, the second advent – the second appearance of God in the concrete form of Jesus the Messiah – is the event that marks the end of the present age of human history.” The author finds that “it is the event that opens the final act in God’s solution to the problem of sin, not only in human history on the Planet Earth, but also in the whole created

²⁸⁴ Mathews (2012:1022) says the “The LXX (Daniel 4:37, Theodotion; Deuteronomy 10:17, and Daniel 2:37) uses some or all of this name.”

²⁸⁵ Mathews (2012:1022) describes that “[i]n 19:12 the Rider had a name written on His crowns, which no man knew but Himself. In 12:13 we find that this Rider is named the Word of God. Now, in 19:16, Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords. In 17:14 we saw this name in reverse - Lord of lords and King of kings. Jesus is sovereign over all the rulers on this earth.”

²⁸⁶ This is also true of the New Testament with “an estimated one verse out of every 25” which refers to the Second Advent, according to Bacchiocchi (1987:107).

moral universe” (Guy, 1987:211). Bacchiocchi (1987:107) defines this Advent hope “as already fulfilled by Christ’s first Advent and as yet-to-be consummate at His Second Advent.” Case in point, it could be said that biblical history is “the *Story of the Advent*, the story of God who came down to this planet to create, who came down to redeem, and who ultimately will come down again to restore this world and His people” (Bacchiocchi, 1987:106).

Maxwell (1985:487) highlights some of the prominent foci in the Apocalypse on the coming Christ. He shows that “Chapter 1 promised that Jesus would come ‘with the clouds’ and ‘every eye’ would see Him (7)” and that in “the Philadelphian letter Jesus promised, ‘I am coming soon’ (Revelation 3:11)” (Maxwell, 1985:487). The author further stipulates that “[u]nder the sixth seal (Revelation 6:12–17), signs of the second coming were fulfilled in the sun, moon, and stars” where the lost “cried out for rocks and mountains to hide them from the ‘wrath of the Lamb’” (Maxwell, 1985:487). Moreover, Maxwell (1985:487) understands that after “the three angels’ end-time messages (Revelation 14:6-12),” Christ is seen “seated on a white cloud, ready for the second coming” with voices heard “calling for the grain and grapes to be harvested (Verses 14–20)...” Then, in Revelation 19, “‘heaven’ itself is ‘opened,’ and John sees” Christ “as a celestial general seated astride an imposing ‘white horse’” coming with the second coming.

With regard to the Divine Christ, historicism does reveal Christ as divine. With reference to Revelation 1:8 where Christ calls himself the “Alpha and Omega,” Mathews (2012:134) comments that “Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet” and that every word “in Webster’s unabridged dictionary can be made from the twenty-six letters of the alphabet.” Mathews (2012:134) finds that “[e]very word that God speaks in the Bible is made up of the divine alphabet, Jesus Christ,” where he is “the *logos*, the total Word, the total message of God.” He elucidates that “John’s use of merisms illustrates the scope of God’s control of all history” where Christ is “the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the Ending, the First and Last” (Mathews, 2012:134). Hereby Christ “informs us that He is the totality of the Godhead” (Mathews, 2012:134) and “the Ruler of All... the one who has achieved dominion over this world through His sacrifice” (Mathews,

2012:145). Concerning Christ's divinity, Mathews (2012:151) remarks, "Only true deity can lay claim to such sweeping titles." Mathews (2012:151) discovers that this text where Christ says he is first and last is an echo of Isaiah which "testifies well to the eternal nature of Christ." Mathews (2012:151) quotes, "Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he" (Isaiah 41:4; 44:6) and indicates that "John applies another title of God to Jesus Christ." Regarding this text in the Apocalypse, Stefanovic (2002:68) concludes that "is a reaffirmation of the eternally existent God, Yahweh," who biblically is Christ.

Considering Christ in and through history, historicism does portray Christ in and through history. According to Gulley (2016:25), "[t]he fact that the book begins in John's day and reaches to the eschatological advent suggests its relevance to all interim history." This will also apply to Christology within apocalyptic. Commenting on Revelation 1:8, Stefanovic (2002:69) extols that Christ "is the one **who is and who was and who is coming, the Almighty**." The author claims that "world history from the biblical perspective has both a meaningful beginning and conclusion because of Christ" (Stefanovic, 2002:69). He asserts that the "Second Coming is in reality the coming of the God who acts" for he "acted in the past, he is present now, and he always will be" (Stefanovic, 2002:69). In a concise treatise on the ever-present God of promise, Stefanovic (2002:69) states that a "promise is as strong and trustworthy as the one giving the promise" and that the promise of Revelation 1:8 "is given by the eternal and omnipresent God." Therefore, Stefanovic (2002:69) claims, the "conclusion of this world's history will not come through 'a gradual process' of either degradation or development, but through the coming of Christ in glory and majesty" as the God of continual promise. Subsequently, the author informs that "[t]he fulfillment of that promise is to come in accordance with his eternal nature and plans" (Stefanovic 2002:69). Stefanovic (2002:69) further argues that the "purpose of the book of Revelation is not primarily to inform us about the future, but to present the eternal and mighty God who holds the future" where it "assures Christians throughout history that no matter what the future brings, the eternally existent" Christ is in control. This shows that Christ "knows what the future brings and ultimately directs the course of history" (Stefanovic, 2002:69) in and through history

as the ever-present Christ of promise. Figure 5.4 below illustrates the historicist view of Christ in and through history, as compared to the views of preterism and futurism.

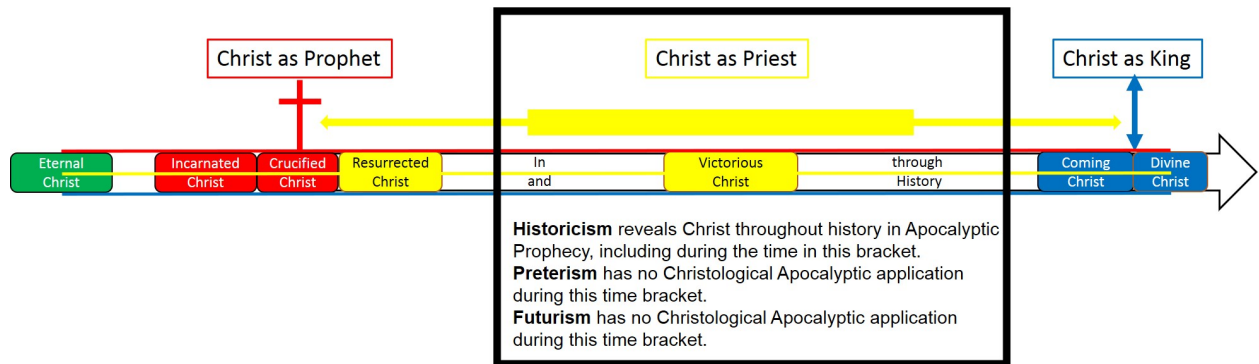


Figure 5.4 Schematic illustration of the historicist view of Christ in and through history

From the evidence above, historicism incontestably satisfies the Christological analysis.

5.3.2 An Apocalyptic analysis of historicism

As shown earlier, it is critical to interpret apocalyptic prophecy according to the nature of apocalyptic. As an apocalyptic hermeneutic, historicism takes seriously the genre of apocalyptic, despite those who are starting to challenge this.²⁸⁷ To determine whether historicism is indeed apocalyptic, it will now be evaluated by utilising the Apocalyptic Analysis proposed in Chapter 2.

Historicism is in harmony with the *Apocalypse's striking contrasts*. Gulley (2016:17), confirming that "[t]here are striking contrasts in the book of Revelation," provides some examples:

... people of God and people of the adversary; the seal of God and the mark of the beast; the Faithful and True Witness and the serpent that deceives the world; the virgin and the harlot; the armies of heaven and the armies of earth; the marriage supper of the Lamb and the fowls' supper of the men of the earth;

²⁸⁷ As with futurism that had to disregard Revelation as an apocalyptic genre, some 'historicist' scholars are arguing for this on a gradual level as to fit with their slow move away from historicism.

songs of praise to God and cries of agony for rocks and mountains to fall; the fruit of the tree of life and the wine of the wrath of God; the New Jerusalem in glory and Babylon in shame; and the sea of glass and the lake of fire.

Gulley (2016:17) assesses that “Apocalypics generally bring two sides sharply into focus” where it makes “clear divisions between good and evil.” Critical to apocalyptic, according to Gulley (2016:17), is that rather “than a gradual fusion or blending of one into the other,” it portrays “a clear line of demarcation.”

Historicism is in harmony with the Apocalypse’s *cosmic sweep*. Gulley (2016:17) presents that the apocalypse has a cosmic sweep “with an emphasis on eschatology.” He elaborates that “[t]here is an ongoing struggle between good and evil in history, a history that tends even to degenerate as it proceeds in time” (Gulley, 2016:17). This struggle between good and evil has been formulated earlier as the cosmic controversy which forms the framework of historicism. This cosmic controversy plays out in history. However, Gulley (2016:17) indicates that “history is moving toward an end at which God Himself will directly intervene to destroy evil and establish righteousness.” Thus, history will move “to a time when God will vindicate His people who so often are downtrodden during the present era” (Gulley, 2016:17).

Historicism is in harmony with the Apocalypse’s *eschatological emphasis*. Gulley (2016:17) stresses “the eschatological emphasis of an apocalyptic” which is in “contrast to general prophecy, which puts primary emphasis on the historical setting and then moves to eschatological implications.” The author confirms that “Apocalypics tend to view history as if from the end time itself, when history is consummated in a grand and glorious eschatological climax” (Gulley, 2016:17–18). He proceeds to explain that, “whereas general prophecy looks at world history from the standpoint of humanity’s position (or God’s view of it from where humanity is), apocalypics can be said to view history from the standpoint of God’s position in both place and time” (Gulley, 2016:18). Apocalyptic has, “as it were, a peculiarly transcendental focus,” according to Gulley (2016:18), where from “the standpoint of a literary device, it could be said that whereas the historical setting is primary for general prophecy, the historical setting is functional for an apocalyptic.”

Historicism is in harmony with the Apocalypse's *implied ethic*. Guy (1987:224) posits that a "form of the impact of the future on the present" brought about by apocalyptic "may be called *eternalization*," which can be defined as "the permanent importance that the eternal future gives to the decisions of the transient present." This apocalyptic impact on core decisions in the present is implied ethic, for "the quality of the final future – the nature of the ultimate destiny of individual human beings – is profoundly influenced by every person's choices in the present" (Guy, 1987:224). According to Guy (1987:224), "[t]he decisions of tomorrow are in part the product of those of today; and the totality of specific decisions constitutes an ultimate general decision to affirm and identify with, or to reject and dissociate oneself from, the character and reality of God." Therefore, in the context of apocalyptic, every "present moral choice implies an ultimate choice of being or nonbeing, a choice that even divine love does not overrule" (Guy, 1987:224). Further to this implied ethic in the present believer's life, "the present of an individual may, insofar as it encourages or discourages certain attitudes, values, and decisions of others, exert a significant influence on the eternal future of others" (Guy, 1987:224).

Historicism is in harmony with the Apocalypse's *origin in times of distress*. Stefanovic (2002:4) indicates how "[t]he book of Revelation was written in a time of Roman hostility toward Christianity that eventually turned into direct persecution." Further to this persecution, the churches also "were suffering due to conflicts with the Jews" (Stefanovic, 2002:6). "Confronted with the growing hostility of Rome, as well as the invading heresy and increasing apostasy within the church," Stefanovic (2002:8) observes that "the Christians in Asia were concerned about their own identity and existence" and would consequently ask, "What would the future bring?" Stefanovic (2002:15) accentuates that "[t]heir dire circumstances may have led them to question whether God was still active and in control, and what the future would bring to the church." Subsequently, he remarks that "although the situation in the world seems threatening and hostile to God's people, and the future might appear gloomy, God in Christ is indeed still 'the master of history'" (Stefanovic, 2002:9). The author assures that "He is and always will be with his people. He will 'fully vindicate them at a grand and glorious eschatological climax'" (Stefanovic, 2002:9).

Historicism is in harmony with the Apocalypse's *basis in visions and dreams*. Paulien (2006, as cited in Reid, 2006:247) mentions that apocalyptic "disclosures are sometimes communicated to the writer by otherworldly beings, such as angels or the twenty-four elders of Revelation." Similarly, Stefanovic (2002:21) holds that it is common to apocalyptic writing "that its content was based on visionary experience while the author was 'in the Spirit' (cf. Rev. 1:10) conversing with angels." He also articulates that the "writer is frequently carried away in vision to distant places and allowed to observe grandeur and majestic supernatural scenes" (Stefanovic, 2002:21).

Historicism is in harmony with the Apocalypse's *extensive use of symbolism*. Stefanovic (2009:17) highlights that in "a style typical to apocalyptic writing, a very distinguishing feature of the book of Revelation is its peculiar and symbolic language." The author points out that "John states at the very outset (Rev. 1:1) that the contents of his book were revealed to him in symbolic or figurative language (Gr. *semaino* means 'to make known by signs')" (Stefanovic, 2009:17). He contends that some interpreters would like to see Revelation's language as "photographic presentations of heavenly realities or coming events that are intended to be understood in a literal way," but its "messages are rather conveyed through symbolic or figurative presentations" (Stefanovic, 2009:17). Stefanovic (2009:17) suggests that, "as a safeguard, Revelation should be approached" with the understanding "that the scenes and actions portrayed there are symbolic or figurative in nature, unless the context clearly indicates that a literal meaning is intended." Naturally, there is no question "that such persons and things as John on Patmos, the seven churches, Christ, tribulation, war, and death are intended to be taken literally" (Stefanovic, 2009:17).

Historicism is in harmony with the Apocalypse's use of *composite symbolism*. Letseli (2009:23) refers to composite symbolism from the Books of Daniel and Revelation where horns and eagles speak, iron can be mixed with clay, leopards can have four heads, and dragons can chase women through the sky. Equally, Stefanovic, throughout his commentary on Revelation, points out the use of composite symbolism. With reference to the double imagery of Christ in the seven letters to the church, Stefanovic (2009:138,139) mentions that "[a]s in other messages to the churches, this description is

drawn from the composite picture of the glorified Christ and is appropriate to the particular situation of the church (Rev. 1:16; cf. 1:4).” Later, the author also notes that the “[m]ention of the sea as the source from which the monstrous beast of Revelation 13:1 comes is a clear allusion to Daniel 7:2–3. This is evident from the fact that the composite beast incorporates the characteristics of all four beasts from Daniel’s vision (Dan. 7:3–7)” (Stefanovic, 2009:410).

Historicism is in harmony with the Apocalypse’s *eschatology from outside of history*. Paulien (2006, as cited in Reid, 2006:247) finds that “[a]pocalyptic books use the form of a story to disclose things of God beyond the ability of the five senses to comprehend,” where divine realities break into “the course of history leading up to God’s salvation at the end of the world.” The author writes that “[a]pocalyptic sees the world as evil and as oppressive, under the apparent control of Satan and his human accomplices,” but that “the present world order will shortly be” disrupted from outside of history and “destroyed by God and be replaced with a new and perfect order, corresponding to Eden” (Paulien, 2006, as cited in Reid, 2006:248). According to Paulien (2006, as cited in Reid, 2006:248), the “final events of history involve a severe conflict between the old order and the people of God, but the outcome is never in question.” The Apocalypse promises that “[t]hrough a mighty act of judgment, God will condemn the wicked, reward the righteous, and re-create the universe” (Paulien, 2006, as cited in Reid, 2006:248).

Historicism is in harmony with the Apocalypse’s *divine sovereignty and unconditionality*. In a simple, encompassing statement, Paulien (2006, as cited in Reid, 2006:248) proclaims, “Apocalyptic worldview portrays God’s overarching control of history.” God’s sovereignty is absolute,²⁸⁸ as seen in apocalyptic prophecy. These prophecies are unconditional for it “sees history as a divinely-guided series of events leading up to, and including, the final events of earth’s history” (Paulien, 2006, as cited in Reid, 2006:248). Paulien (2006, as cited in Reid, 2006:248) confirms that “apocalyptic prophecies are unconditional, reflecting God’s foreknowledge of His ultimate victory and the establishment of His eternal kingdom.”

²⁸⁸ This does not negate divine love. See section 5.2.2.

From the above it is evident that historicism unmistakably satisfies the apocalyptic analysis.

5.3.3 A prophetic image analysis of historicism

Apocalyptic prophecy is filled with prophetic imagery and, as mentioned earlier, these images should be interpreted carefully and correctly. Historicism does acknowledge the use of prophetic imagery within Revelation. Although historicism is notorious for its different proponents who have been interpreting Revelation's symbolism differently through the centuries, in its growth, especially within Adventism, there has been mainly consensus on most of the Apocalypse's symbols. Like preterism, historicism seems excellent in interpreting symbolism. I will now perform a prophetic image analysis on historicism by utilising the Prophetic Image Analysis developed in Chapter 2.

Historicism does recognise the symbol as fluid, representative, and varying in different contexts. Paulien (1992, as cited in Holbrook, 1992:211) argues that symbols "by their varied nature are fluid in meaning." He suggests that the symbol's "particular significance must be determined by the immediate context, and not necessarily by their use in a previous context" (Paulien, 1992, as cited in Holbrook, 1992:211). He also advises that "[w]here the author's point is not plain from the immediate context, the interpreter may seek clues in the themes and context of background passages," but these "should never be permitted to undo the meaning of texts which are reasonably clear in their own right" (Paulien, 1992, as cited in Holbrook, 1992:211).

Historicism does understand the reasons why symbols are used. In reference to the symbol of the 'Root' or 'Sprout of David' in Revelation 5:5, Stefanovic (2009:203) understands the reason for the symbol of the 'Sprout' as linked to the time when the covenant promise was given to David with regard to the perpetuity of his throne (cf. 2 Sam. 7:12–16), that it would be "fulfilled in the coming of a descendant to sit on the throne and rule over the nations." Stefanovic (2009:203) explains that "[a]mong the Jewish people in John's time, 'the Sprout of David' became the favorite title with reference to the Messiah who would sit and reign upon the throne of David (cf. Luke 1:32–33)." When studied in the New Testament, Stefanovic (2009:203) observes that "the Sprout of David"

and 'the son of David' are well-known titles with reference to Jesus, the Messiah, the king par excellence." Paul also cites Isaiah 11:10 "as having been fulfilled in Christ (Rom. 15:12)" (Stefanovic, 2009:203).

So, in consideration of the reason for the symbol of the 'Root' or 'Sprout of David', it must be noted "that John presents Christ as 'the Sprout of David' in the beginning of the principal prophetic part of the book (5:5) as well as in its closing statement (22:16)" (Stefanovic, 2009:203). Hence, Stefanovic (2009:203) understands the reason for the symbol of the 'Root' or 'Sprout of David' as that it "was meant to show that the Old Testament promises have been fulfilled in Christ, the Messiah." This is why Stefanovic (2009:17) underscores that, while "Revelation is a symbolic book [it] does not mean that its language is abstract," for the "symbolic language of Revelation was not born in a vacuum, but was grounded firmly in reality." This then calls for definite reasons for each symbol.

Historicism does recognise the source of the symbol. Stefanovic (2009:21) writes that "[t]he apocalyptic writer finds literal language inadequate to portray supernatural things and subtle heavenly realities. In describing them he uses highly symbolic language." These symbols are derived from various sources. Stefanovic (2009:18) regards that "an understanding of Revelation's prophecies involves learning what can be known about the sources from which John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, gleaned the symbols and images he used in describing the visions he saw." Stefanovic (2009:18) claims that it "has been generally recognized that the symbolic language of Revelation can be traced to at least four sources," namely that of the "the Old Testament, Jewish apocalyptic writings, the first-century Asia Minor setting, and the New Testament writings," with the greatest source being the Old Testament from which "John drew symbols almost entirely," according to Stefanovic (2009:18), "while responding to first-century religious, social, and cultural milieu." To Stefanovic (2009:22), "[t]he material of Revelation is permeated with Old Testament imagery interpreted through the person of Jesus Christ and his life and ministry."

Continuing with the symbol the 'Root' or 'Sprout of David' in Revelation 5:5, considered in the last question, Stefanovic (2009:203) recognises the source of this symbol as going

“back to Isaiah 11:1, which declares that ‘a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his root’ will establish the coming kingdom of peace and righteousness (cf. 11:10).” Stefanovic (2009:203) holds that in “this passage, ‘the root’ is the origin of the new shoot from the fallen tree of David which has been cut down.” Stefanovic (2009:203) further illuminates how “Jeremiah speaks of the future when God will fulfill his promise and ‘raise up for David a righteous Branch [Sprout] and He will reign as king’ (Jer. 23:5–6; 33:14–16).” The author also points out how “Zechariah prophesied of ‘a man whose name is Branch [or Sprout], for He will branch out from where He is; and He will build the temple of the Lord. Yes, it is He who will build the temple of the Lord, and will bear the honor and sit and rule on His throne” (Stefanovic, 2009:203). Stefanovic (2009:203) thus finds that Christ “will be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace will be between the two offices.”

Historicism does respect the symbol as to its relationship to the main theme wherein it is found. A fitting example is the numeral symbol of seven found in the Apocalypse. Will historicism respect it within its relationship to the main theme wherein it is found? When Stefanovic (2009:203) investigates the symbol of seven in the context of Revelation 5, he comments that the “fact that the scroll was sealed with seven seals is particularly significant in light of the meaning of the number ‘seven’ both in Revelation and in the Bible as a whole (it appears in nearly six hundred passages, either literally or symbolically).”

Moreover, Stefanovic (2009:203) finds that “[s]even’ is ‘the only number used symbolically in Scripture to any degree with discernible significance,’ and ‘this is the only number which appears to be used symbolically with any consistency in contemporary extra-biblical literature.” He also mentions that it is generally accepted that “the fundamental ancient and Old Testament idea of the symbolic use of ‘seven’ is ‘fullness,’²⁸⁹ ‘completeness,’ or ‘perfection” (Stefanovic, 2009:203). Stefanovic (2009:203) shows that in “the Old Testament, ‘seven’ functions as the sacred number of the covenant between God and his creation, for all ‘covenant relations and obligations’ and the ceremonial

²⁸⁹ Stefanovic (2009:203) mentions that, “[a]s an expression of the divine totality, the number “seven” plays an important role in Revelation (it is used 56 times in the book). As the introduction to this commentary shows, the number ‘seven’ seems to play an important part in the structure of Revelation.”

system appear to be associated with the number 'seven.'" This then respects and enlightens the use of 'seven' in the context of Revelation 5 where covenant is prominent.

Historicism considers the symbol within its immediate and literary context. As both designations, 'Sprout of David' (referred to in Revelation 5:5) and the 'Son of Man' (in Daniel 7:13–14) refer to Christ, the question is whether this then means that the prophetic setting correlates in similar fashion. This can only be determined by the immediate and literary context. In determining whether Revelation 4–5 echoes the judgment events of Daniel 7:9–14, Stefanovic (2009:170), in view of the immediate and literary context, states, "First, the foregoing arguments do not support any judgment-scene view with regard to Revelation 4–5."

Secondly, Stefanovic (2009:170) argues that "if Revelation 4–5 describes the investigative judgment scene," then it follows that "everything that follows Revelation 5, including the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the ministry of the two witnesses of Revelation 11," would occur after this judgment scene. However, a "careful analysis of Revelation 6–11 does not support such an idea," according to Stefanovic (2009:170).

Stefanovic (2009:170) then evaluates the "discussion of the literary arrangement of Revelation" which shows "that the structural composition of the first half of the book focuses on the Christian era, rather than on the eschatological period." He insists that the "evidence clearly supports the view that Revelation 4–5 describes the enthronement of the resurrected Christ at the right hand of the Father (cf. Dan. 7:13–14; Phil. 2:6–11), the event which occurred at Pentecost (Acts 2:32–36), as the most satisfactory interpretation" (Stefanovic, 2009:170). Stefanovic (2009:170) thus presents that one "would expect, then, that the material following Revelation 5 covers history throughout the Christian era from the first century until the Second Coming," rather than it being the judgment and the eschatological events which follow subsequently.

From this discussion, it is evident that historicism satisfies the prophetic image analysis.

5.3.4 An exegetical analysis of historicism

Exegesis lies at the heart of the approach of any model of biblical interpretation. This section will determine how historicism weighs when five critical questions are employed, derived from a key eschatological Bible passage.

(i) Does this interpretation view the Parousia to be literal, real and observable?

Historicism does view the *Parousia* to be literal, real and observable. Peth (1988:527–529), after examining 2 Thessalonians 2, concludes, “Christ will return in one public event that will be audible, visible and glorious.” With reference to the same text, Wohlberg (2001:21) holds that it becomes clear that this coming is a visible coming, for “Christ comes down from heaven to catch up His church (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17),” and “He is coming with mighty angels and in flaming fire (2 Thessalonians 1:7,8).” In terms of observability, Maxwell (1985:490) confirms that the *Parousia* will occur “visibly” and “openly”, while Mathews (2012:1015) describes it as “indisputably and undeniably real.”

(ii) Does this interpretation view the Parousia as being preceded by the coming and revelation of the Antichrist?

Historicism does view the *Parousia* as being preceded by the coming and revelation of the Antichrist. LaRondelle (2001:13) writes that Paul, in his second letter to the church at Thessalonica, had to “respond to an error regarding the timing of the parousia of the Lord,” since some in the Thessalonian church believed that the day of the Lord was “already here (verse 2).” LaRondelle (2001:13) states that Paul had to refute “this premature sense of apocalyptic fulfillment.” He underscores that Paul reminded them that the future rise of ‘the lawless one’ must precede the Day of the Lord, and since the “antichrist figure had not yet made his ‘parousia’ apparent with ‘power, signs, [and] lying wonders,’ Paul said that the day of Christ’s parousia could not yet have come (verses 3, 4, 9)” (LaRondelle, 2001:13).

In similar fashion, Bacchiocchi (1987:123) concurs that “Paul emphasizes the significance of the pre-Advent apostasy, when he warns the Thessalonians against the deceptive teaching that Christ has already returned (2 Thess 2:2),” explaining to them that “Christ

‘will not come, unless the rebellion comes first’ (2 Thess 2:3).” In other words, “the rise of the Antichrist must come first, before the church is ‘caught up,’ or gathered” to Christ (Wohlberg, 2001:21). With reference to this passage, Wohlberg (2001:20) claims that “Paul’s words are nothing short of cataclysmic when it comes to the issue of which comes first,” the *Parousia* or coming of the Antichrist.

Bacchiocchi (1987:123) emphasises that “Paul recognized that the End-time apostasy predicted by Christ was ‘already at work’ (2 Thess 2:7) at his time, but he makes it abundantly clear the ‘*the apostasy*,’ that is, the well-known pre-Advent rebellion had not yet taken place.” Paul rather “points to this fact to show to the Thessalonians that Christ could not have possibly already returned, because before (‘first’ – 2 Thess 2:3) His Return, there is to come a final, climactic apostasy” (Bacchiocchi, 1987:123). Christ could not come in the first century, because according to Paul “the falling away must come *first* and the Antichrist must be revealed” (Wohlberg, 2001:21).

(iii) Does this interpretation view the coming of the Antichrist to be literal, real and observable?

Historicism does view the coming of the Antichrist to be literal, real and observable. Wohlberg (2001:21) believes this antichristian coming to be literal and real when he describes it to literally “rise”, “come” and “be revealed”. Likewise, De Kock (2013:811) holds a literal and observable “rise”, “plenitude”, “real character”, “decline”, “and final overthrow” of the Antichristian power, “distinctly described in 2 Thessalonians 2.”²⁹⁰. De Kock (2013:442) further describes how Paul declared that the lawless one would literally and visibly “sit in the temple of God and proclaim himself to be God” when he comes with observable “signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception... (2 Thess. 2:1–11, RSV).” The author writes that of “special importance is that in writing about the Antichrist the apostle Paul described a person or entity with a lifespan of almost two thousand years”

²⁹⁰ LaRondelle (2001:13,14) shows this literal and observable antichristian power in terms of that in 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul uses “Daniel’s sequence of world empires in his prophetic forecasts (2 Thess. 2:3, 4 applies Dan. 7:25; 8:25; 11:36, as the New American Standard Bible rightly indicates). Daniel is the indispensable key to understanding Paul’s outline of the church age in 2 Thessalonians 2.15 Paul urges the church therefore to watch for the signs of the predicted apostasy (cf. Acts 20:29, 30), so that the Parousia or Day of the Lord will not surprise her like a thief (1 Thess. 5:1-6).”

(De Kock, 2013:112). Even in its day, the principle “of anomia was already beginning to stir into life within the church,” which in time “would mushroom into a full-blown apostasy and endure until” Christ’s coming “at which time he will destroy the Antichrist ‘with the spirit of his mouth’ and ‘the brightness of his coming’ (2 Thess. 2:8)” (De Kock, 2013:112). Nothing could be more real and literal than such a long reign and eventual destruction.

(iv) Does this interpretation view the Parousia as destroying the Antichrist?

Historicism does view the *Parousia* as destroying the Antichrist. De Kock (2013:826) recognises that the Antichrist will “in self-idolatry and open rebellion against God, attempt to found an absolute world monarchy, until the final judgment dealt with it (Rev. 17:10, cf. 2 Thess. 2:3, etc.).” De Kock (2013:450) also understands that Paul “in his time indicated as much: ‘The mystery of lawlessness is already at work’” but that “‘the lawless one’ is not destined to last forever.” On “the contrary, ‘the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and his coming.’ (2 Thess. 2:7, 8, RSV)” (De Kock, 2013:450).

LaRondelle (2001:14) assures that “Paul stressed the effect of the glorious Parousia on the antichrist: the Lord will come to destroy the lawless one ‘with the breath of his mouth, annihilating him by the manifestation of his coming [parousia]’ (2 Thess. 2:8).” In contrast, the “effect on the saints will be quite the opposite: ‘As to the coming [parousia] of the Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to Him [episynagoge] ...’ (2:1; cf 1 Thess. 2:19; 4:15–17)” (LaRondelle, 2001:14).

(v) Does this interpretation view God to be in control of end events?

Historicism does view God to be in control of end events. Neall (1983:21), after illuminating that “Paul explained in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4 that the Lord would not come until after the supremacy of the man of sin” which will endure to the parousia, shows that these prophecies “picture human history marching inexorably to its climax” where they “underline the sovereignty of God.” Neall (1983:21) therefore concludes that God “is in control, and His will will not be thwarted.”

With reference to 2 Thessalonians 2, De Kock (2013:22) points out that “the Antichrist is a very long-lived beast,²⁹¹ whose career was to stretch from the first century until the Second Coming.” God is letting this happen according to his divine will for the Antichrist “will persist until the Second Advent,” when “there will be a final confrontation between Christ and Antichrist, ‘whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming’ (2 Thess. 2:8)” (De Kock, 2019:159). Christ will overcome Antichrist and demonstrate God’s sovereignty over end events.

It can be concluded that historicism, in terms of this analysis, is exegetically sound.

5.3.5 A practical relevance analysis of historicism

This last analysis of historicism will be performed by means of the Practical Relevance Analysis proposed in Chapter 2.

Historicism does offer hope in one’s situation. In the context of historicism, Guy (1987:226) argues that “[h]ope is the authentically Adventist relationship to time, and may therefore be understood in terms of the future, the past, and the present.” This renders hope untenable if not in terms of the future, past and present. Guy (1987:226) explains that “[h]ope is first of all anticipation of a particular future – anticipation that is composed of eagerness and patience.” The author describes hope’s eagerness as “eager for the arrival of the future because the future means the liberation and fulfillment of humanity in the presence of God, not its negation and the dissolution of its meaning” (Guy, 1987:226). He likens theological hope to the natural eagerness of children, stressing that “hope is not euphoria”; rather, “its eagerness is complemented by a patience that gives to hope its resilience and durability, so that it can survive delay and disappointment without disillusionment” (Guy, 1987:226). In this way it “can remain alert to the possibilities of grace, and attentive to what is happening – and especially what God is doing – in the world” (Guy, 1987:226).

²⁹¹ De Kock (2013:22) explains that Paul “said that even in his day “the mystery of lawlessness” (2 Thess. 2:7, NKJV) was already at work, though something was still restraining it. The apostasy would continue until the Second Advent. “And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming” (vs. 8, NKJV).

Guy (1987:226) reasons that if hope were exclusively related to the future, “it would be merely a free-floating fantasy, an elaborate product of wishful thinking, a pious illusion.” He maintains that, to “be valid and valuable, hope must be based on a particular understanding of the past and particular experience of the present” (Guy, 1987:226), which would render historicism critical to hope. With regard to Christ’s coming, Guy (1987:226) highlights that “the relevant past is the historical event of the revelation of God in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.” Here, in Christ’s past ministry on earth, “the outcome of the ‘great controversy’ was determined, even though it is not yet actualized,” according to Guy (1987:226), for “the decisive battle was fought and won, and the ultimate future ensured.” Now the “relevant present is the personal transformation known as the ‘new birth’ (see John 3:3-8), confirmed by the continuing presence of the Holy Spirit in one’s own existence (see 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:13,14)” (Guy, 1987:226). “This experiential validation of the historical revelation in Christ provides a confidence that can accommodate the unexpected” (Guy, 1987:226), whereby the believer looking forward in faith to a better future by Christ will have hope in the present.

Historicism does help one make sense of life. Guy (1987:224) states that “[t]he impact of the envisioned future on the experienced present is felt in many forms,” and yet “the present is obviously not the final reality.”

Guy (1987:224) discards the lasting propensity of the present in that “[e]very particular experience is temporary: ‘This too shall pass.’” Guy (1987:224) feels that “[o]n the one side, the evil that distorts the present is not the last word; and on the other side, the good fortune that blesses the present carries no guarantee of permanence.” The author explains that pain, therefore, is “made more endurable and joy less intoxicating,” for “each has only relative significance in the light of a future that is incomparably superior to the present because it is both infinite in duration and perfect in quality” (Guy, 1987:224). He further elucidates that in the context of Christ’s coming, “life is not any less conditioned by factors beyond a person’s knowledge or power to control; it is still characterized by ‘givenness’” (Guy, 1987:224); yet, “neither this general fact nor the particularities of the ‘given’ need be overwhelming” in the task of making sense of life. To Guy (1987:225), “those who are confident of the future can calmly attend to the tasks of the present,” while

undoubtedly knowing that “the precise shape of the future remains unknown and unknowable... because the causal factors involved are too complex to be fully accessible to human inquiry.” This embeds uncertainty²⁹² in life. Yet, according to Guy (1987:225), “certainty regarding the ultimate future of humanity and regarding the presence of God’s love in one’s own life makes it possible to concentrate on responding positively to today’s opportunities and responsibilities without apprehension or insecurity about tomorrow’s possibilities” in one’s making sense of life.

Historicism does impart motivation to spirituality. Guy (1987:225) emphasises that “the impact of the future on the present” can also be a “vision of the future” as an “incentive for present activity” and spirituality. Regarding “Adventist activism²⁹³ – its sense of world mission, its evangelist outreach, its medical and educational enterprises, its publications,” Guy (1987:225) observes that it “has developed because of, not in spite of, its conviction of the occurrence of the eschaton ‘in this generation.’” This type of activism is a critical direct outflow of spirituality. “While to others it may seem paradoxical to work so diligently in this world while expecting a kingdom of God only in the next,” Guy (1987:225) insists that “to Adventists themselves the connection is really quite straightforward” for “whatever improvements can be made in the health and/or education of people are likely to facilitate a positive response to God and therefore contribute to the richness of the eternal future of human beings.” Guy (1987:225) views Adventism’s most well-known hymn, ‘Lift up the trumpet, and loud let it ring; Jesus is coming again!’ not merely as a hymn, but also as an

²⁹² Guy (1987:225,226) discusses this uncertainty as follows: “For individuals there is always the compounded uncertainty of health, employment, and personal and family relationships; no one’s future is against disaster. For nations and the world as a whole, the view of the proximate future is not only dim; even worse, what general outlines can be guessed yield a gloomy picture of a host of problems – political, economic, ecological – whose solutions may well be painful and slow, and perhaps impossible to achieve.”

²⁹³ The Seventh-day Adventist Church operates one of the largest health networks globally with 211 hospitals and sanitariums and 440 clinics and dispensaries. It also operates the largest protestant educational network globally with 8 807 schools under which is 118 tertiary institutions. (Seventh-day Adventist Church n.d., *Seventh-day Adventist World Church Statistics 2018*, Seventh-day Adventist Church, viewed 27 July 2020, <<https://www.adventist.org/articles/seventh-day-adventist-world-church-statistics-2018/>>). It is also one of the fastest growing churches globally with being the fastest growing denomination in North America. (MacDonald, GJ 2011, *Adventists' back-to-basics faith is fastest growing U.S. church*, USA Today, viewed 27 July 2020, <[>](https://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/religion/2011-03-18-Adventists_17_ST_N.htm)).

“inner motivation to invest oneself in service and witness to the world” – which is true spirituality.

Historicism does provide inspiration to ethical living. According to Guy (1987:226), “a conception of the ultimate future can serve as a clue to the nature of present reality and as a guide for present efforts to live constructively and redemptively in the world.” Guy (1987:226) reasons that “the fact that the final future includes the same kinds of reality²⁹⁴ and being that appear in the present world suggests that each of them has its own legitimacy, purpose, and value.” The author further states his case in “the materiality of ultimate humanity, which means that the body is in no way a ‘limitation’ from which humanity is to be finally delivered, or a ‘deficiency’ to be finally transcended” (Guy, 1987:226). Guy (1987:226) argues that “the body is the means by which the rest of the created universe is to be experienced, understood, and enjoyed.” The natural implication in Guy’s (1987:226) mind “is genuine respect for and diligent care of the body, and the development of the abilities of sensory perception” as it “also implies the enjoyment of sensory experience as part of the divine intention for human beings.” Seeing the future in this way means that if “the ultimate future represents the fulfillment of God’s creative purpose, it is surely appropriate to endeavor to make the present as much like the future as possible” (Guy, 1987:226). To believers with a hopeful future in view, this means “repairing as far as possible the damage resulting from sin, without ignoring the crucial differences between the present and the future” (Guy, 1987:226) as one’s moral values and ethical living is directly impacted. While in reality we are still sinners, ethically “we can try to minimize sin in all of its expressions, and we can try to make up for some of its consequences” (Guy, 1987:226). Guy (1987:226) therefore finds that “it is eschatologically proper to overcome interracial and intercultural estrangement, to work for international peace and good will, to alleviate poverty as far as possible, and to

²⁹⁴ Guy (1987:226) explains these same kinds of reality as “While they may be related in a progression of ontological ‘levels,’ with each higher level incorporating the qualities of those ‘below’ it, no kind of being is to be understood as merely a ‘means’ to the existence or the fulfillment of another, supposedly higher kind of reality or being. Although the color, design, and fragrance of a flower may enrich human existence, the value of the flower itself is not exhausted by this instrumental function. Because of its original creation by God and its place in God’s future, it is to be understood as having its own reason for existence in the presence of God.

encourage every person to develop his/her full intellectual and creative potential” as true ethical living.

Historicism does furnish eschatological relevance as ‘the hand of God in history’ (Guy, 1987:225) influences our very existence. Guy (1987:225) depicts current relevancy starting in history as there “is ultimate significance in the whole of history, and not just in the comparatively small portion of history that is directly involved in the events of salvation.” Guy (1987:225) believes that “every political or cultural development, every military engagement, has some effect on the shape of freedom and justice somewhere in human existence.” Bringing this in connection with the future to be of relevance, Guy (1987:225) states that “[h]istory may thus be seen not as exclusively negative and destructive, ultimately to be reversed by the divine interposition of the *eschaton*,” therefore not “as merely a meaningless collocation of events surrounding the great ‘acts of God’ on Planet Earth, but as an eternally significant (albeit still morally ambiguous) part of the determination of the ultimate destiny of human beings.” As history is relevant to our destiny, so is the apocalyptic reality of the future. LaRondelle (2013:54) encourages the believer, assuring that “[t]he risen Lord Jesus built His Apocalypse and is providing His church with truth that would encourage His followers to persevere and to renew their hope in the kingdom of God.” LaRondelle (2013:54) writes that “John provided a new perspective on the future of God’s covenant people.” John’s “instructions were: ‘Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later’ (Rev. 1:19)” (LaRondelle, 2013:54). Thus, it can be stated that the Apocalypse “begins with the apostolic church and proceeds through the post-apostolic church until the end of this age” (LaRondelle, 2013:54). Therefore, through the lens of historicism, it is eschatologically relevant for “[t]his revelation was given for the guidance and comfort of the church throughout the Christian dispensation” (LaRondelle, 2013:54). LaRondelle (2013:54) finds that “[n]o other book in the Bible fills this need more sublimely.”

From the analysis above, it is obvious that historicism does provide practical relevance.

5.4 CONCLUSION

Some will claim the invalidity of historicism, arguing that apocalyptic fulfillments in history have been proven a futility. But there is insufficient research to invalidate careful historicist interpretation, which shows definite historical fulfillments supported by sufficient historical data fully aligned with apocalyptic prophecy like the foundational prophecy in Daniel 2²⁹⁵. The multiplicity of arguments though, tries to discredit historicism on the grounds of differences and inconsistency among its adherents²⁹⁶. But such arguments itself are validating historicism, as there is much inconsistency among the adherents of futurism, preterism and idealism too. In contrast with the analysis of preterism and futurism in chapters 3 and 4, this research's theological analysis shows historicism to be an adequate hermeneutic.

Yet, of the three main apocalyptic hermeneutics, historicism is currently the most rejected. In the literature, MacArthur (1999:10) accuses historicism as “allegorizing the text,” being “a subjective, arbitrary, and whimsical approach” with a “myriad of conflicting interpretations” by a historicist “would-be interpreter”. Michaels (1997:23) complains that historicism is “bankrupt” as it is “revised again and again,” while Beale (1999:46) claims that historicism is too specific and “limits the prophecies,” that historicists “cannot agree with one another,” and that the interpretation school has “little relevance”. Whereas Morris's (1984:17) objection to historicism is that it “ignore[s] the world outside western Europe,” Gregg (1997:37) criticises historicism for being “too flexible” and “too parochial”. Stanjević (2016:15–16) emotionally accuses historicism of “armchair speculation, sectarian rigidity, egocentric particularity, ethical passivity and ... misleading language.” Disputing these would-be arguments (which are mostly focused on inconsistent

²⁹⁵ Section 5.2.1 *Apocalyptic principle in Daniel 2: throughout history to the end*. This apocalyptic prophecy in Daniel 2 establishes the historicist principle upon which the subsequent prophecies build and can be understood, showing that the historicist hermeneutic is not a presupposed axiom that is just randomly chosen or preferred for the interpretation of apocalyptic. All subsequent apocalyptic prophecies in Daniel and Revelation builds on this foundation of real historical fulfillment throughout time.

²⁹⁶ The reason that most objections to historicism is focused on differing and inconsistent interpretation, is because it is not easy to explain away historical fulfillments that fits completely with a specific prophecy.

interpretation) was not the aim of this study as everyone is inherently biased regarding his or her own paradigm.

There is sufficient data to reasonably conclude that historicism does face a critical challenge regarding the historicists who use or misuse its principles. When the writings of Adventist historicists are studied, the glaring reality of inconsistency presents itself as contradictory conclusions are drawn. This poses a weakness among well recognised historicists within the SDA Church who have provided within their own writings conflicting answers, undermining the very principles of historicism. By being inconsistent, historicists weaken their own argument. This is a serious challenge, as it leaves the historicist position vulnerable. But while vulnerable and therefore challenged, historicism was demonstrated in this chapter to not only make a valuable contribution to eschatology and theology, but also proved to be an adequate hermeneutic despite inconsistency among its proponents.

The fact that historicism is based on a hermeneutic derived from biblical apocalyptic itself shows its warranted approach. Coupled with its floorwork of divine sovereignty and love which guides its ultimate source and aim, historicism is set to provide a decent interpretation to apocalyptic prophecy. As this is done in the framework of the cosmic conflict perspective, sufficient context is provided to stay in the biblical narrative and scope.

In the analysis of historicism, it was firstly found that historicism is at its core Christological. Secondly, it has been established that historicism recognises the Apocalypse as apocalyptic and interprets it true to apocalyptic principles. Thirdly, historicism passed the prophetic image analysis. Fourthly, historicism proves to be exegetically sound, and lastly, historicism was found to be relevant and practically applicable to a Christian's life in the present.

In view of this chapter, historicism can be summarised as follows:

The historicist method, as a Christocentric continues-historical recapitulationist hermeneutic, views biblical apocalyptic in reference to the symbol-filled prophecies of Daniel and Revelation as meeting its progressive singular fulfillment in literal historical

time and history specific events, by divine providence through the cosmic sweep of redemptive history in forward movement from the author's time, always pointing and moving to the coming *eschatos*, and ever proceeding to literal christological fulfillments as meanings becomes evident in retrospect, strengthening faith in the present between the past and future.

To summarise, Chapter 5 commenced with a detailed definition of historicism. Subsequently, it mapped the main historicist teachings. Finally, historicism was critically analysed by means of the analysis model proposed in Chapter 2. Chapter 6 will be the final, concluding chapter.

CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The research question of this study was: *How can a theological analysis of preterism, futurism and historicism aid in identifying the more adequate of these systems for interpreting apocalyptic prophecy?*

Subsequent to the exploration of each of these interpretation schools, this final chapter aims to identify the more adequate hermeneutic.

6.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The previous three chapters presented critical evaluations of preterism, futurism and historicism. From the summarised findings of these evaluations, presented below, the more adequate hermeneutic will become evident.

6.1.1 Mapping of the three interpretational schools

This section summarises the construction of each of the three interpretation schools – the foundations they are based on, their floorwork, frameworks, pillars²⁹⁷ and roofs.

The foundation of *preterism* is the dating of Revelation, which is AD 64–68. Without this foundation, there can be no preterism. The floorwork of this hermeneutic is composed of biblical time indicators such as ‘soon’, ‘near’ and ‘shortly’. It is argued that the Apocalypse itself infers that its prophecies will ‘soon’ be fulfilled around the author’s day. In its pillar teachings, preterism teaches not to consider prophetic time as symbolic. It also teaches that there are no signs showing either the nearness of the Second Coming, or indicating that those who expect Christ to come will go through the tribulation before his coming, as it had already transpired in the distant past. Moreover, preterism upholds that the Second Coming is two comings, thereby making it a confusing doctrine. It depicts a spiritual coming of Christ in AD 70 and a physical coming in the distant future. There are also two resurrections for the righteous according to preterism, with two final judgments, namely the judgment of the Jews in AD 70, and the judgment of the world in the distant future. At

²⁹⁷ Without repeating information already stated in previous chapters, intriguing findings sprouting from investigating these key pillar teachings will be summarised.

the pinnacle (roof) of its construction, preterism advocates a theocracy before Christ's coming.

The foundation of *futurism* is dispensationalism, a complicated system in which God reveals himself differently and progressively through various dispensations and where an absolute distinction is made between Israel/the Jews and the Church. Dispensationalism demands a literalist interpretation, which forms the floorwork of futurism. In keeping with its literalistic hermeneutic, futurism teaches not to consider prophetic time as symbolic. According to futurism's pillar teachings, there are no signs showing the nearness of the rapture. It also teaches that those who expect Christ to come will not go through the tribulation before his coming, as the rapture will remove the church. Futurism further teaches that the Second Coming comprises two comings: a secret rapture of the church and a glorious coming seven years later. Futurism also upholds two resurrections for the righteous and two final judgments: the Church will be judged with the rapture, while the world and Jews will be judged after the seven-year tribulation. Ultimately, futurism advocates a theocracy before the rapture.

The apocalyptic principle of interpreting apocalyptic prophecy throughout history to the end – portrayed in Daniel 2 – forms the foundation of *historicism*. This principle which forms the foundation of historicism was found to be inherent in the texts of both Daniel and Revelation and its use not only warranted but mandated. Historicism's floorwork is divine sovereignty and love that shows a God that gives prophecy and is in control of world events and world history; yet, divine love grants humanity freedom of choice, translating prophecy as God's foreknowledge but not as a determination in spite of our free will. This understanding of apocalyptic sets the stage for historicism's framework, namely the cosmic conflict perspective. Historicism teaches to take prophetic time seriously, in harmony with the nature of apocalyptic. It also teaches that there are signs of the times showing the approaching nearness of the Second Coming as well that those who expect Christ to come will go through the tribulation before his coming. Moreover, historicism teaches that the Second Coming is one coming which results in one resurrection for the righteous at this one Second Coming of Christ. Historicism also upholds one final judgment. Finally, historicism warns against a coming theocracy and proclaims religious liberty.

6.1.2 The critical analyses of the three interpretational schools

This section focuses on the summarised findings of the critical analyses of the three interpretation schools in terms of the five-tier analysis model developed in Chapter 2.

Firstly, *preterism* is limited when it comes to being Christological. Secondly, it is not true to apocalyptic as it does not acknowledge the basic apocalyptic principles. Thirdly, although preterism mostly satisfies the prophetic image analysis, it is not always consistent in considering the symbol within its immediate and literary context. In the fourth place, while excellent in overall exegesis, preterism failed the specific exegetical analysis, although it must be noted that the exegetical analysis applied here was not totally indicative of preterist exegesis. Yet, this analysis did reveal that key apocalyptic passages are not exegeted well as the data are manipulated in certain instances to make the texts fit the preterist narrative. Finally, preterism does not offer much practical relevance for a Christian's life.

Futurism firstly proves to be overall Christological, despite certain critical areas within Christology that it does not portray, for instance Christ in his priestly ministry. Secondly, futurism rejects Revelation as being apocalyptic for the reason that it does away with the foundation (dispensationalism) and floorwork (literalism) of its hermeneutic. Thirdly, futurism failed the prophetic image analysis for the simple reason that it rejects Revelation as apocalyptic literature. In the fourth place, futurism dismally failed the exegetical analysis as it has to exegete passages according to the dispensational model. Lastly, regarding its practical applicability to a Christian's life, futurism may or may not be relevant, differing from person to person, as its futuristic outlook does provide some hope in a dark present.

Firstly, throughout its historical and eschatological narrative, *historicism* is Christological as it portrays Christ in all his ministry phases as well as in and throughout history. Secondly, historicism is true to apocalyptic as it applies all its principles in its interpretation of the apocalyptic books of Daniel and Revelation that portray a universal sweep and global effect of God's act throughout history to the coming eschaton. Thirdly, historicism wholly satisfied the prophetic image analysis in interpreting symbolism, approaching the text with the understanding that it is highly symbolical, unless otherwise indicated by the

context. Historicism is fourthly exegetically sound according to this analysis, as it adheres to all the principles of apocalyptic within a Christological context, which uncomplicated the exegetical process in apocalyptic. Lastly, historicism has helped believers through the ages to make more sense of their circumstances as they have tried to interpret the Apocalypse historically and see the relevance for themselves in their present situation with hope in the coming future of the *eschatos*.

6.1.3 Critique of the three interpretational systems

This section focuses on the positives and negatives of the three interpretational systems.

The evidence provided in this research reveals that *preterism* has made positive contributions to the doctrine of last things. Preterism appears to be a decent scholarly hermeneutic with good theological methods and careful interpretation of apocalyptic symbolism. “[I]t takes the time of John or history seriously” (Letseli, 2009:4). This entails that there is proper historical emphasis and research within preterism as well as thorough textual study.

Further, in today’s world filled with populist movements, there is no “Last Days Madness”²⁹⁸ but rather “Prophecy without Panic”²⁹⁹ as preterism champions itself to be “An Optimistic View of The Last Days”.³⁰⁰ Preterism brings calmness to a discipline that tends to excite and lead people to the extreme.

However, based upon the foregoing mapping of preterism and the admittedly delimited scope of questions asked in the analysis model, there is sufficient data to reasonably conclude that preterism faces some critical challenges.

²⁹⁸ DeMar, G 1999, *Last Days Madness*, Amazon.com, viewed 25 March 2020, <https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0915815354/ref=dbs_a_def_rwt_bibl_vppi_i0>

²⁹⁹ Shennea, D 2015, *Prophecy Without Panic: A Brief Introduction to Partial Preterism*, Amazon.com, viewed 25 March 2020, <<https://www.amazon.com/Prophecy-Without-Panic-Introduction-Preterism-ebook/dp/B014K1P7FM>>

³⁰⁰ Stephens, MJ 2018, *How the End Times ended in AD 70: An Optimistic View of The Last Days*, Amazon.com, viewed 25 March 2020, <https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B07FFJ3KMW/ref=dbs_a_def_rwt_bibl_vppi_i0>

Without the dating of Revelation (believed to be AD 64–68) which forms the foundation of preterism, there can be no preterism. The entire premise of preterism is based on a foundation that may be no foundation at all for if the date is wrong, then the interpretation is wrong. This seriously discredits preterism. Also, preterism cannot be verified historically, owing to its highly disputed premise of the authorship date of Revelation. Moreover, with its floorwork composed of biblical time indicators such as ‘soon’, ‘near’ and ‘shortly’, preterism evidently revolves around timing. Without this time element, preterism is of no value and meaningless, wherefore if these ‘time elements’ were found to be interpreted incorrectly, it would nullify this hermeneutic. To add, in its pillar teachings, it teaches not to consider prophetic time as symbolic, in contrast with its symbolic approach to the apocalyptic text.

In addition, preterism is limited when it comes to being Christological as it is so focused on proving the literal prophetic event close to the author’s day that there is little of Christ to be found, which in itself refutes the exercise of prophecy which is supposed to be a Revelation of Jesus Christ in his totality. Furthermore, preterism proves not to be true to apocalyptic as it does not acknowledge the basic apocalyptic principles, for instance that the very nature of the Apocalypse denotes a future eschatology from outside of history. Therefore, in essence, it rejects the apocalyptic characteristic of divine sovereignty coupled with the cosmic sweep when “it sees a rather limited judgment of the world focused on Jerusalem” (Mathews, 2012:87) and thereby reduces God’s acts and sovereignty in and through history to mere localised and time limited events almost 2 millennia ago. Finally, preterism does not offer much practical relevance, for how could it with its prophetic application removed to a distant past, with no bearing on the present?

Evidence provided in this research reveals that *futurism* has made positive contributions to the doctrine of last things. Futurism can be commended for taking the future or second coming seriously. It is a hermeneutic that determinedly views eschatology as a biblical surety.

It can further be commended for its Christocentric focus. While many eschatologies and interpretive systems tend to focus more on the specific end events alone, futurism manages to keep Christ in focus. Another positive aspect of futurism and the worldview it

brings is its practical relevancy in that it may give people hope in situations that can seem hopeless.

However, based upon the foregoing mapping of futurism and the admittedly delimited scope of questions asked in the analysis model, there is sufficient data to reasonably conclude that futurism also faces some critical challenges.

Firstly, futurism's floorwork of literalism, based on its questionable foundation of dispensationalism, is dubious. In keeping with its literalistic hermeneutic, it teaches not to consider prophetic time as symbolic, which is in contrast with the nature of apocalyptic that requires a symbolic approach. Moreover, dispensationalism is a complicated system not really found outside of this hermeneutic, which in all probability makes futurism circular reasoning with a questionable foundation.

Secondly, futurism rejects Revelation as being apocalyptic because it does away with the foundation (dispensationalism) and floorwork (literalism) of its hermeneutic. Apocalyptic genre portrays a cosmic sweep that includes all ages throughout history which does not allow for dispensationalism and asks for a symbolic approach which excludes literalism. Further to its rejection of Revelation as apocalyptic literature, it cannot successfully consider symbolism within its immediate context, wherefore it tends to interpret many symbols as literal realities. Futurism thus dismally fails to exegete well as it has to exegete passages according to the disruptive dispensational model within the harmonious scriptural narrative.

In conclusion, futurism in its very approach cannot be judged to be either sensational or factual. As Gregg (2013:43) expounds, "[it] cannot be verified or falsified" as all its interpretations "have not yet occurred." However, futurists assert that they will never "be embarrassed by future developments, since they believe that they will be raptured before any of the predicted events occur" (Gregg, 2013:43). This leads to the question of futurism's probability.

Sufficient evidence provided in this research reveals that *historicism* has not only made positive contributions to the doctrine of last things, but is an adequate hermeneutic. Historicism is a hermeneutic that takes apocalyptic and history seriously. It consistently

applies the cosmic sweep of apocalyptic throughout history to the coming *eschaton*. It further builds faith in God through fulfilled prophecies in the actual realities that transpired, giving hope in God through prophecies yet to be fulfilled in the future, climaxing in the coming *eschatos*. Thus, from the author's day right through history to the coming of Christ, all believers throughout history can receive faith and hope by means of such a hermeneutic.

To add, historicism is inherent in the texts of both Daniel and Revelation and its use not only warranted but mandated. This gives historicism an advantage.

Historicism further shows a God who gives prophecy and is in control of world events and world history. Still, it portrays divine love that grants humanity freedom of choice, translating prophecy as God's foreknowledge but not as a determination despite our free will. Historicism's cosmic conflict perspective also allows the interpreter of apocalyptic prophecy to see the larger paradigm involved.

In addition, historicism throughout its historical and eschatological narrative is Christological as it portrays Christ in all his ministry phases as well as in and throughout history. Historicism is also true to apocalyptic as it applies all its principles in its interpretation of the apocalyptic books of Daniel and Revelation that portray a universal sweep and global effect of God's act throughout history to the coming *eschaton*. Furthermore, it is quite outstanding in interpreting symbolism, approaching the text with the understanding that it is highly symbolical unless otherwise indicated by the context. Moreover, exegetically it adheres to all the principles of apocalyptic within a Christological context, which uncomplicates the exegetical process in apocalyptic.

However, the study of historicism revealed that there is sufficient data to reasonably conclude that the application of historicism faces some critical challenges. Coupled with the different SDA historicist variants of *philosophy of history*, *idealism* and *eclecticism*, as seen in section 5.1.5, there are concerning internal challenges among SDA historicists. When the writings of Adventist historicists are studied, the glaring reality of inconsistency presents itself as contradictory conclusions are drawn as presented in section 5.1.5.

This poses a weakness among well recognised historicists within the SDA Church who have provided within their own writings conflicting answers, undermining the very principles of historicism. By being inconsistent, historicists weaken their own argument. This is a serious challenge, as it leaves the historicist position vulnerable.

In conclusion and with all fairness, it can be stated that Adventist historicist scholarship are in serious need of more agreement on the fundamental principles of historicism. This need among historicist scholars to be in stronger agreement concerning the fundamental principles of historicism, if addressed, will enable historicists to be more consistent in their application of apocalyptic within their own writings.

6.2 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Several recent studies have theologically evaluated preterism and futurism against each other. Still, insufficient research exists evaluating these hermeneutics against historicism. Although the current research has been done from an Adventist and historicist perspective, the study aimed to develop an analysis model from a broad spectrum of theologians outside of Adventism which would be a fair and acceptable paradigm to preterists and futurists as well. Similar research from preterist and futurist worldviews could be helpful.

Further research is also required for bringing to light the theocratic notions from within preterism and futurism, the effect it may have on populist movements within society and government, and how this should be addressed.

More research is also needed among historicists to address their prevalent inconsistencies.

6.3 IN CONCLUSION

The current study set out to identify an adequate school of apocalyptic interpretation within the discourse of eschatology, for which purpose this theological study within systematic theology analysed the way apocalyptic prophecy is interpreted within broader discourses on eschatology. The different hermeneutical assumptions of the three major interpretation schools of apocalyptic models were researched and challenged. Preterism,

which assigns apocalyptic prophecy's fulfilment to the past; futurism, which consigns apocalyptic prophecy's fulfilment to the future; and historicism, which disperses apocalyptic prophecy's fulfilment throughout the lapse of history, were the focus of the study. Critical analyses of these apocalyptic interpretation schools, performed by utilising a five-tiered analysis model, determined that there appears to be sufficient evidence that historicism can be stated as a theologically adequate apocalyptic hermeneutic within the doctrine of last things (eschatology), since it was established that historicism is Christological, interprets apocalyptic prophecy according to the nature of apocalyptic, acknowledges the use of prophetic imagery and understands how to translate it, is exegetically sound, and provides practical relevance to a Christian's life.

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